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REWEAVING THE TAPESTRY OF ANCIENT ULSTER

by Donald M. Schlegel

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I. Introduction

The oldest surviving historical tradition of the Irish states 'the tales and histories of the men of Ireland are not known and are not authentic till the time of Cimbaeth mac Fintainn'. This Cimbaeth was king and, according to some, founder of Emain Macha, the Navan Fort in the present County Armagh. Even long after Cimbaeth's time, we face the situation very aptly described by Standish O'Grady:

Spite its splendid appearance in the annals, it [Irish history] is thin, legendary, evasive. Looked at with the severe eyes of criticism, the broad-walled highway of the old historians, on which pass many noble figures of kings and queens, brehons, bards, kerns and warriors, legislators and druids, real-seeming antique shapes of men and women, marked by many a carn, piled above heroes illustrious with battles, elections, conventions, melts away into thin air. The glare of bardic light flees away; the broad, firm highway is torn asunder and dispersed; even the narrow, doubtful track is not seen; we seem to foot it hesitatingly, anxiously, from stepping-stone to stepping-stone set at long distances in some quaking Cimmerian waste. But all around, in surging, tumultuous motion, come and go the gorgeous, unearthly beings that long ago emanated from bardic minds, a most weird and mocking world. Faces rush out of the darkness, and as swiftly retreat again. Heroes expand into giants, and dwindle into goblins, or fling aside the heroic form and gambol as buffoons;

gorgeous palaces are blown asunder like a smoke-wreath; kings, with wand of silver and ard roth of gold, move with all their state from century to century; puissant heroes, whose fame reverberates through and sheds a glory over epochs, approach and coalesce; battles are shifted from place to place and century to century; buried monarchs re-appear, and run a new career of glory. The explorer visits an enchanted land where he is mocked and deluded. All that should be most stable is whirled round and borne away like foam or dead leaves in a storm.¹

Some time ago it became apparent to Irish scholars that the history of Ireland before the sixth century, as passed down to us from the seventh and later centuries, is a construction by the scholars of that later era. Because of their efforts to synchronize the undated records of Irish pre-history with each other and with events in the classical world, these monastic scholars have sometimes been called the 'synchronists'. The tasks they carried out were to give Ireland a glorious past in which all of the people of the island were a single nation, and to place that nation within the biblical history of the world.

The early synchronists tried to connect epochs in Irish history to epochs in classical history.² Their earliest known attempt³ set the era of Cimbæth of Emain just after that of Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. and that of Cimbæth's fourteenth successor equal to the birth of Christ (even though the regnal lengths of this 'dynasty' do not fit within the specified period).

Eoin MacNeill remarked 'Irish historians did not long remain content with the view that the Gaelic occupation of Ireland was no more ancient than 331 B.C. The dates assigned gradually grew more and more remote'. The second stage was to fit Irish history into a biblical framework, inspired by the work of Isidore of Seville (570-636). To fill the resulting longer time span, the synchronists combined together the historical records of the various *tuatha* and provinces, added to them, and constructed an almost-harmonious whole. In this process many genealogies were created and the regnal lists were padded. Concurrent events were made to be sequential. The eleventh century, the era of Flann Manistrech, Gilla Coemáin, Marianus Scotus and Tighernach, was perhaps the most productive for this effort, during which time *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, the earliest Annals, and the earliest great genealogical tracts were shaped into their final form. As Eoin MacNeill wrote in 1910 'Gilla Coemáin's long list of 136 monarchs of Ireland before St Patrick's time is for the most part the product of medieval invention. The earlier section of the Irish genealogies, constructed in harmony with that list, must also be in the same degree artificial. Probably the materials in each case were collected largely from traditional sources...'

1. Standish James O'Grady, *History of Ireland, Vol. I: The Heroic Period* (London, 1878), (New York, 1970), 27-28.
2. John MacNeill, 'An Irish Historical Text Dated A.D. 721', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1910), vol. 28, C, 123-148 (hereafter MacNeill, 1910).
3. Ibid. MacNeill identified 'tract A' in portions of the *Book of Ballymote*, scattered on folios 9 and following.

Here and there, gaps in the harmony of the story were left unfilled, facts were left unreconciled or remained unsuppressed, that reveal to us glimpses of the original records. Surviving works from various eras make later development of the process obvious. During the last century, Irish scholars have been busy analysing the origin and patterns of this history of the synchronists and deconstructing it.

The present seems to be an auspicious time to begin to re-weave the strands preserved by the synchronists, as far as possible, into the original tapestry that represented ancient Ulster. The re-weaving is based on MacNeill's insight that the materials used by the synchronists were not wholly invented but were collected from traditional sources. Under the assumption that the phantoms described by O'Grady were caused by the same stories being drawn from different sources, being seen and presented as different stories by the medieval scholars, persons and events have been sought that appear in more than one setting. These stories have been reunited, where possible. Archaeology and other sources are drawn upon as seems appropriate to assist in the re-telling.

II. The Ancient Peoples and Kingdoms

The Cruithni

The earliest large population group of Ulster probably was the Cruithni. In prehistoric times they may have been a people quite distinct from the rest of Ireland's inhabitants. Their kinsmen, the Cruithni of Alba, that is, those called the Picts of Scotland, as late as the eighth century were said to differ from the Irish in language and at least one important cultural trait.

We have the testimony of Adamnan's life of St Columba and that of the Venerable Bede that the Picts' language was different from that of Ireland, at least sufficiently that a translator was needed. The language of the Cruithni in Ireland, if it truly had been different, was overcome by that of the Gaels at such an early date that nothing remained of it in the historic period.

Bede states flatly, in agreement with Irish legend and with the implications of classical writers, that the succession of the Alban Cruithni's kings, at least in doubtful cases, was in the female rather than in the male line. This has been disputed in the late twentieth century, but Bede's statement is so straightforward that it is difficult to discount.⁴ If consistently practiced, this matrilineal succession would determine that a king might be succeeded by a uterine brother, a son of his sister, or a son of his mother's sister, but seldom, if ever, by his own son. Bede, however, states that this system was used in Scotland only when the succession was in doubt, so that instances of both matrilineal and patrilineal succession might be expected. The father of a Pictish king sometimes would be

4. Notably Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men* (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), 57 ff. In a similar vein, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín disputes the relationship between the Cruithni of Ireland and the Cruithni or Picts of Scotland (*Early Medieval Ireland* (New York: Longman, 1995)).

a member of an unrelated family or tribe, sometimes a visiting foreign prince.

At least echoes of this system seem to have survived into the early sixth in Ulster. Two families can be identified, the use of whose names implies succession in the female line. These are the families of MacErca in north-central Ulster and MacNise in northeast Ulster. MacErca was the name of the first Bishop of Ardstraw, consecrated, according to *Tírechán*, by St Patrick. Eoin MacNeill showed that early Irish names in *maccu* often were quasi-surnames, in which the 'ancestor' was not a person but was a tribal designation, in which the 'ancestor' sometimes was female.⁵ That MacErca does not fit this pattern of a patrilineal family with a female 'ancestor' is shown by two instances of members of a patrilineal family who were called MacErca or MacErcae: (1) Muirheartach mac Muireadaigh meic Eogain of the Uí Niall, whose family conquered portions of Ulster in the fifth century, and (2) his distant cousin, a son of Ailill Molt, who died in 543. The name came from their mothers, implying that the name passed through the female line. The centre of Erca or Erc's power, or perhaps cult, was at Drum Lighen (now Drumleene) on the west bank of the Foyle, near Lifford. Erc, supposedly daughter of Loarn Mór of the Dál Riada and wife of Muiredach mac Eogain and then of his cousin Fergus mac Conaill, was said (in the poem *Enna dalta Cairpri cruaid* in the *Book of Fenagh*) to have 'left' her property to St Cairnech.

In northeastern Ulster, in Dál Riada, the name MacNise presents a similar picture. Fergus Mór son of Erc, king of the Dál Riada late in the fifth century, was known as MacNise, though succession among his people was patrilineal; and his son Domangort, who died about 507, likewise was known as 'MacNisse Reti'.⁶ The first Bishop of Connor, Angus son of Fobrec, also was known as MacNise. In both MacErca among the Uí Niall and MacNise among the Dál Riada we can see the use of a name inherited from the female ancestors, used by a children who were heirs to both traditions.

Rudraige was said to be the ancestor of the Clanna-Rudraige, the family who supposedly provided many kings to Ulster. He may be a back-formation, an eponymous ancestor invented for, the Ruad-raige, the Lordly-people of Ulster. He appears in four guises. (1) He was said to be a son of Partholon and drowned at Loch Rudraige, and the loch burst forth over the land when his grave was being dug. (2) Rudraige mac Dela was one of the four leaders of the Fir-bolg when they invaded Ireland, landing at Traig-Rudraighe in Ulster. He ruled Ulster from the Drowes in the west to Drogheda in the east until he was killed at Brugh on the Boyne. (3) Rudraige mac Sithri was the 78th King of Ireland, ruling for 30 years, and died of a plague at Arged-glenn or Argetlind (in present County

5. Eoin MacNeill, 'Early Irish Population-Groups: Their Nomenclature, Classification, and Chronology', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* (1911), 29C, 72-75 (hereafter MacNeill, 1911).

6. *Annals of Ulster*, anno 507.

Monaghan).⁷ He was made to be a grandson of a cousin of Cimbaeth, Aedh Ruadh, and Dithorba, who will be mentioned below, and great-grandfather of Conchobar MacNessa. (4) *Leabor Gabála* lists many of the battles that he fought. These are in Cork, Kerry, Limerick, Clare, Leitrim, and Roscommon, so far from Ulster that perhaps a fourth Rudraige fought them. According to the later genealogies his descendants, the Clanna Rudraidhe, were Dál Aradian, which is to say Cruithni.

Traditional and Classical Geography

According to old accounts, Cermna and Sobarki were the first kings of the Ulaid. Sobarki ruled north of a line from Inver Colpa (near Drogheda) to Limerick. He built Dun Sobarki (Dun Severick) on the north Antrim coast. This implies that Cermna ruled south of that boundary and that the Ulaid, in total, ruled a large portion of Ireland at one time. At least one historical tradition, which the synchronists attempted to suppress, implies that 'the history of the Gaedhil begins with the foundation of the Ulidian kingdom'.⁸ This kingdom had its capital at *an Emhain* or Emain Macha, the Navan Fort near Armagh.

The earliest mentioned southern boundary of Ulster was the River Boyne at its mouth and so the province included some portion of the present counties Meath and Westmeath. According to *The Intoxication of the Ulad*, under Conchobar MacNessa Ulster stretched from Rind Semni and Latharnai (Island Magee and Larne) to Cnoc Uachtair Forcha (Uisneach) to Dub and Drobaís (the Duff and the Drowes, flowing into Donegal Bay).⁹ Keating says that about the time of the Cruithni 'arrival' in Ireland the Fregobal or Ravel Water in Antrim and the Ethni or Inny River in Westmeath and Longford burst forth over the land.¹⁰ Glen Ravel was on the northeastern boundary of the Cruithni, on their border with the Dál Riada, and this textual juxtaposition might indicate that at an early date the Inny also was a boundary, the western extension of their southern boundary at the Boyne. The *Táin* implies a tradition that the Boyne tributary now called the Tremblestown, running past Athboy, was the Ulster boundary from the Boyne to the Inny.¹¹ From the mouth of the Inny the boundary would be north and west to Lough Allen, Lough Macnean, Lough Melvin, and the mouth of the Drowes (though at one time it perhaps ran south of this suggested line in the far west).

In MacNessa's time, it is said, there were three kings in Ulster. Their identities perhaps are not as important as the kingdoms that they represent and it is interesting that this division ignores the non-Cruithni peoples of Ulster:

7. Geoffrey Keating, *Foras Feasa ar Eirinn: The History of Ireland*, translated by John O'Mahony, (New York: James B. Kirker, 1866), 261; Edmund Hogan, *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1910 (1993)), 49; *Book of Leinster*, 23a.

8. MacNeill, 1910, 143.

9. Jeffrey Gantz, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas* (New York: Dorset Press, 1985), 193.

10. Keating, 217.

11. Thomas Kinsella, translator, *The Táin* (Oxford U. Press, 1969), 72ff (hereafter Kinsella).

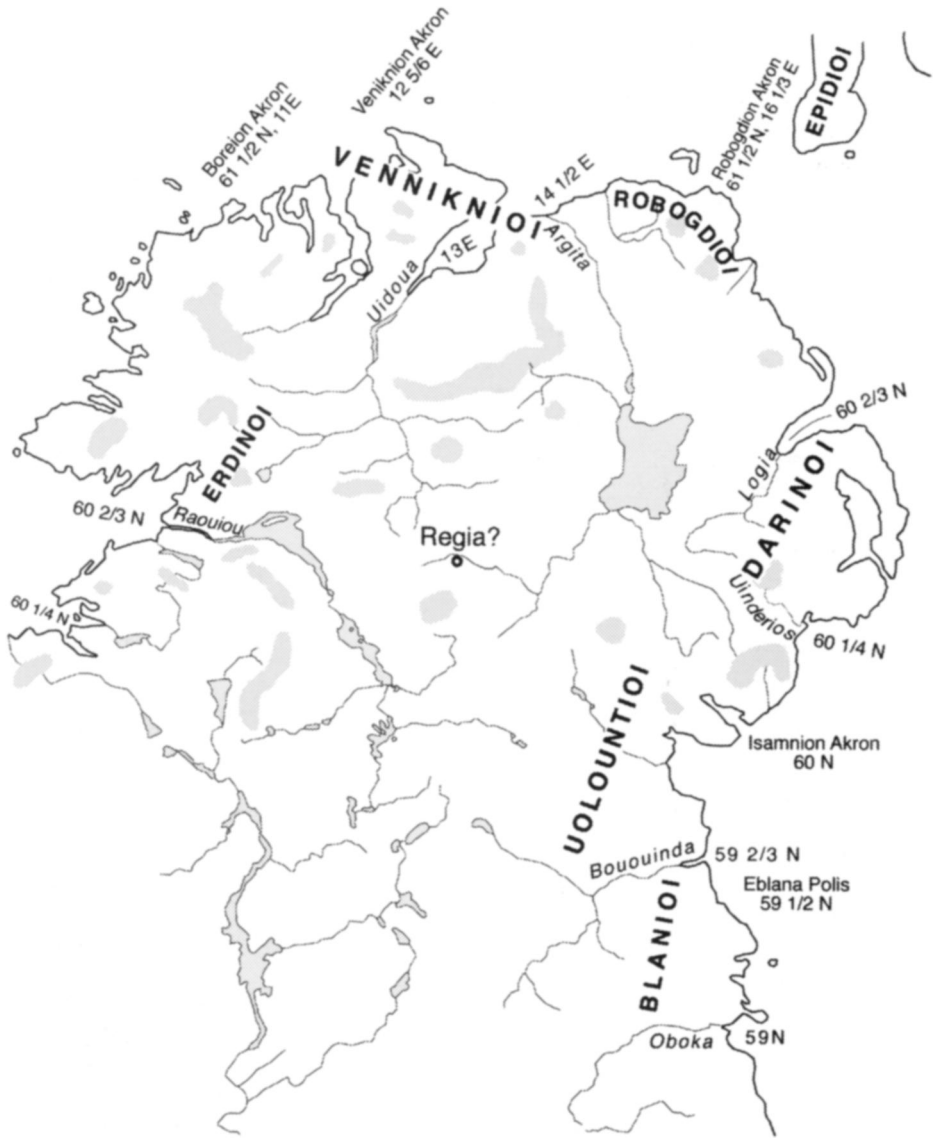


Fig. 1: Ulster in Ptolemy's Geography

- Cúchulain ruled from Cnoc Uachtair Forcha (Uisneach in Westmeath) to Tráig Baile (Dundalk), i.e. the south of Ulster. This kingdom is represented in historical times by the much smaller Cruithni kingdom of Conaille Murtheimne, that is, central and southern County Louth.
- Conchobar ruled from Tráig Baile to Tráig Tola. Tráig Tola is unidentified, but clearly was in the northwest. Rudraige in his guise of mac Dela, the Firbolg, is said to have ruled from the Drowes to Drogheda, apparently this same kingdom. Tollan Strand, south of the mouth of the Erne and north of the Drowes, is probably Tráig Tola. This kingdom included the present southern Ulster, an area similar to the Diocese of Clogher but larger.
- Findtan mac Niamglonnach ruled from Tráig Tola to Rind Semni and Latharnai (Island Magee and Larne on the Antrim coast), i.e. the north west, the north, and the later kingdom of Dál Araide. His seat was at Dun Dá Bend, now the mount of Mount Sandal in the northeast liberties of Coleraine. This represents the later and much shrunken Cruithni kingdom of Dál Araide.¹²

The earliest historical reference to the people of Ulster is that written by Claudius Ptolemy the geographer. His description of Ireland, written ca 150 A.D., and based on a work of Marinus of Tyre from earlier in the century, perhaps contained some even earlier elements. It concerns primarily the coastal areas and it includes peoples other than the Cruithni. Ptolemy's geography presents some difficulties of interpretation.¹³ With respect to physical features, his locational co-ordinates represent a distorted map of Ireland. With respect to peoples, precise locations are not given and can only be inferred.

The best fit of Ptolemy's co-ordinates to Ireland's features on the north and east coasts seems to result when three corners of the island are identified as Boreion Promontory, Horn Head in the northwest; Robogdion Promontory, Fair Head in the northeast; and Ieron Promontory, Carnsore Point in the southeast. On the east coast, the intervening latitudes identify the Logia River as the Lagan, the Vinderi River as Dundrum Bay, Isamnion Promontory as the Mourne Mountains, the Bovovinda River as the Boyne, and the Oboka River as the Liffey. Similarly, the intervening latitudes on the north coast identify the Argita River as the Bann, the Vidova as the Foyle, and Venniknion Promontory as Malin Head.

The peoples whom Ptolemy names on the eastern coast of Ulster can be identified. In the northeast, near Robogdion Promontory, were the Robogdii. Their location makes it obvious that these are the Dál Riada, a non-Cruithni people who inhabited the Glens of Antrim. Next south, presumably between the Logia (Lagan) and the Vinderi (Dundrum) and perhaps beyond were the Darine. These in historical times were the Dál Fiatach, another non-Cruithni people, who

12. Gantz, op. cit., 190-191; Hogan, *Onomasticon*, 160; Eugene O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (Dublin, 1878), 266, from the *Siege of Edair*.

13. C. F. A. Nobbe, ed., *Claudii Ptolemaei Geographia* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966), 64-66.

claimed descent from Daire and were said to be a portion of the Dáirine. At the dawn of history the Dál Fiatach also inhabited Bóirche, now called Mourne. The next people to the south were the Uolounti, the Ulaid. This people represents a portion of the Cruithni middle kingdom of Conchobar described above.¹⁴

In early times the Boyne, Ptolemy's Bououinda, was the southern boundary of the Ulaid. South of the Bououinda were the Blani and their town of Eblana, probably reaching to the Oboka or Liffey. In pre-history this was the kingdom of the Luaighni of North Leinster.

The north coast of Ulster, according to Ptolemy, west of the Robogdi, was inhabited by the Uennikni or Vennikni, from whom he names Venniknion Promontory. This name is not attested as a tribe in any Irish record. However, they would have been part of the northern kingdom represented in the legend by Finntan mac Niamglonnach and perhaps *Finntan* is related to *Vennikni*. This Cruithni people probably was related to the Vennicones, Picts whom Ptolemy places on the east coast of Scotland.

On the west coast, Ptolemy's co-ordinates do not easily align with Ireland's geography. The northern-most river he names the Rauí or Ravi, and this we may take to be the Erne and its mouth, anciently called Loch Rudraighe. Nearby he places the people called Erdini. Irish legend remembers the Ernai or the 'red-armed Erainn' in the plain of Loch Erne, but makes them disappear when the lake burst over the land and over them.¹⁵ Máta of Muireasc, of the Olmecnacht, the mother of King Ailill of Connacht, was said to have been of the Ernai.¹⁶ Tír Aedha, the present barony bordering on the Erne in south County Donegal, bears the name of Aedh Ruadh, 'Fire Lord', a local god. Perhaps Ruadh also relates to Ptolemy's river Rauí and Loch Rudraighe. The name of the town and falls of Assaroe on the Erne is in Irish *Eas Aedha Ruaidh*, the cataract of Aodh Ruadh. In some stories he was the father of Macha and his people no doubt were the Ernai of that area. When his divinity was no longer believed in, it was said that he drowned at the falls and was buried in the nearby mound called Sith Aedha.

The next place named by Ptolemy is the town of the Nagnate, perhaps near Sligo or west along the coast of Mayo. The name Nagnate has been connected with Olmecnacht, the oldest known name of Connaught.

The only feature Ptolemy places in the interior of Ulster is the town of Regia. It is impossible to locate this precisely, for this would depend on knowing which

14. Since the eighth century there has been controversy as to whether the Cruithni or the Dál Fiatach were the 'true' Ulaid. Most today favor the Dál Fiatach. Based on Ptolemy's data, it seems that the Cruithni were the original Ulaid; the name in time came to be applied to all the people of Ulster; and after the fifth century was assumed by the Dál Fiatach when they provided most of the kings. Thomas O'Rahilly's argument that the Dál Fiatach were the true Ulaid, which he desired to support his theory of when the Goidels reached Ireland, boils down to just two records in the *Annals of Ulster*, at 607 and 789, in which the 'Ulaid' were opposed to the Cruithni or Dál Ariade in battle. (Thomas O'Rahilly, *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin: The Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1946), 341-352. Hereafter *EIHM*.)
15. Keating, 226 n 25, referring to the *Annals of the Four Masters*; Edward Gwyn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, Part III (RIA Todd Lecture Series, X), (Dublin, 1913), 461.
16. Tomás Ó Máille, 'Medb Cruachne' in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* (1928), 129ff; this item from *Cath Búinde*.



Fig. 2: Ulster in Prehistory

of the distorted coastal co-ordinates its position is more closely connected with. Any site near an axis from the Clogher Valley to the vicinity of Lower Lough Erne is possible. Perhaps Clogher itself was intended.

III. Cimbaeth and the Founding of Emain

Archaeology indicates that some time before 400 B.C., possibly as early as 1000 B.C., a large circular ditch, inside a bank, was dug on the perimeter of the hill of Emain Macha, a form indicating not a defensive but a ritual enclosure, similar to Neolithic and Early Bronze Age henges in Britain. On the hill within the enclosure was erected a large circular structure, possibly a house. This and an adjoining circular stockade were renewed several times over the centuries. Some argue that this was a royal residence, for the remains of a Barbary ape were found there. Others think that Emain was used only for ritual purposes and the residence was at the contemporary Haughey's Fort, some three thousand feet to the west. The word Emain, some linguists think, came from an earlier word (not actually extant in any text) *Isamonis*, perhaps meaning something like 'sacred mound'.

Pollen analysis carried out in recent years indicates some distinct phases of agricultural activity in this prehistoric period. In the era from ca 1000 to 600 B.C. woodlands predominated. From about 600 to 100 B.C. grasses predominated, indicating a pastoral economy. Dendrochronology, analysis of ice cores, and Chinese records all indicate that in 208 B.C. a volcanic eruption spewed enough ash into the atmosphere to change the earth's climate for several years. This inaugurated a period of woodland regeneration and loss of population all across Ireland that lasted until about 300 A.D.¹⁷ Archaeology has found little trace of any influence on Ireland or the Isles of Scotland by cultural developments on the continent during the grassland period from 600 to 100 B.C. About the latter year, changes in burial practices and artifacts indicate that contact with Europe had been established.¹⁸ This contact apparently brought changes in religion.

Just after 100 B.C. a circular building 140 feet in diameter was constructed in the enclosure at Emain Macha. It was not built in the top and center of the enclosure (where proton magnetometry has detected perhaps the earliest circular structure), but was centered on a re-used site some 200 feet to the west.¹⁹ It clearly was a ritual structure. Its outer wall was made of posts set thirteen feet apart, with planks in between. Five concentric rings of posts were set inside in a radial pattern to support the roof (or other structure) and in the center was a huge oak post that was felled in 95 B.C. (It has been dated precisely by dendrochronology.) Three aisles formed by four rows of posts led west from the

17. M. G. L. Baillie, 'Dark Ages and Dendrochronology' in *Emania: Bulletin of the Navan Research Group*, (1993), no. 11, 8-9; David A. Weir, 'Dark Ages and the Pollen Record', *ibid.*, 25-26.

18. Barry Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (Oxford U. Press, 1997), 154, 160, 209.

19. Kenneth L. Kvamme, 'A Proton Magnetometry Survey at Navan Fort', *Emania* (1996), no. 14, 83-88.

center to the outer wall of the building. The earthen floor inside this structure was never smoothed out and no traces of activity on the floor have been found.

Some time after this building was erected, it was filled with a limestone cairn. The stones of this cairn were already weathered, not angular as if freshly quarried. The cairn was carefully built with even slopes up to a relatively level area in the center, and with radial lines built into its surface. Then the wooden structure around and over the cairn was burned and the remaining cairn (with the unburnt bases of the wooden posts inside) was covered with a mound of earth and turves. Soil and turf of various types, seemingly from a variety of locations and environments, were methodically spread in thin layers to build the mound.

C. J. Lynn presented some useful insights to the above facts (which will be extended with further suggestions below).²⁰ The entire process of construction, burning, and covering is seen as a unified ritual, resulting in a mound having on-going religious benefit. The wooden structure was a copy of a more durable structure, which was ritually burned to bring about its transformation from the material to the supernatural world, the otherworld. It seems likely that the otherworld was imagined as taking over the building and cairn *in situ*. It was to be the house of a god, and the circular/radial elements seem to indicate that its dedication was to a sky god.²¹ Indeed, early written sources refer to the mound as a *síd brugh*, a spirit mansion, and in some tales Emain is *in* the otherworld.²²

The goddess for whom this ritual site was named was Macha. She was a goddess of war, one of the three *mór-rioghan* or great queens of Ireland, the others being Neamhan (fury or madness) and Badhbh (a crow or raven). Religion and superstition permeated every aspect of Celtic life, including civic life and social structure, for there was no clear dividing line between the natural and the supernatural. Each tribal territory had its own 'sacred geography' with a tribal sanctuary, a sacred place set apart from the world. It is clear that Macha was the 'tutelary goddess' of the territory of which her sanctuary was the center, and possessed the three common attributes of such a goddess, namely (1) embodiment of the social, legal, and ritual dominion of her territory, (2) beligerance in defense of her territory, and (3) fertility and capacity to regenerate.²³

Macha was said to have been wife of the god *Nuadha Airgead-lámh*, Nuada Silver-hand, king of the Tuatha De Danann, who is to be identified with the legendary Nemed. She also was explicitly said to have been Nemed's wife.²⁴ Nuada was known as Nodens among the Celts of Gaul, a god of healing. Macha also was said to be a daughter of Midhir, son of the Dagda ('the good god'), and the wife of Crunniuc mac Agnomain, and the wife of the king Cimbaeth.

20. C. J. Lynn, 'The Iron Age mound in Navan Fort: A physical realization of Celtic religious beliefs?', *Emania* (1992), no. 10, 33-57.

21. See also Richard Warner, 'Navan and Apollo', *Emania* (1996), no. 14, 77-81.

22. Kay Muhr, 'The East Ulster Perspective on the Ulster Cycle Tales', *Emania* (1996), no. 14, 55.

23. Lynn, *op. cit.*, referring to G. A. Wait, *Ritual and Religion in Iron Age Britain*, British Archaeological Reports, 149 (Oxford, 1985).

24. Keating, 123.

The story of Macha's husband Crunniuc may be summarized as follows. Crunniuc mac Agnomain was a widower who lived in the mountains of Ulster with his sons. A woman came to his house and settled down and began working at once, without saying a word. She became his wife and brought him great prosperity. Soon an assembly or *óenach* was held in Ulster and Crunniuc and his wife went, but she warned him not to be boastful or careless in anything he would say. However, when the king's horses and chariot won all the prizes and the people said that nothing could beat them, Crunniuc boasted that his wife could beat them. He was taken before the king and threatened with death if she would not race, even though she was heavy with child. When asked her name, she replied, 'My name, and the name of my offspring, will be given to this place. I am Macha, daughter of Sainrith mac Imbaith (Quick-running, son of Abundance)'. Then she raced the chariot and as the chariot reached the end of the field she gave birth alongside it. She bore twins, a son and a daughter, and the name Emain Macha comes from this, the Twins of Macha. Their names were Fíor (True) and Fial (Modest).²⁵ The names given for Macha's father and grandfather were her own attributes. A similar story is told by the Welsh of Rhiannon and there are some parallels with the Greek goddess Leto. It may be remarked that Crunniuc, also called Crunn or Crunnchu, sometimes was called son of Agnoman, as was Nemed, and some may have seen him as Nemed in another form.

The other story of Macha, which may be called pseudo-history for it involves the historical king Cimbaeth, says that she was the only child of Aodh Ruadh, the king for whom Assaroe was named. There were three kings in Ulster, namely Aodh Ruadh, who may represent the northern kingdom of Ulster; Dithorba mac Deman, who lived at Uisneach and so represented the old southeastern kingdom; and Cimbaeth mac Finntan, who lived at Finnabair in Magh Inis. Cimbaeth was claimed for the Cruithni by the genealogists, not for the Dál Fiatach who occupied Magh Inis in County Down. The Finnabair that was his home therefore probably was the one pointed out by Morris,²⁶ just south of Ballyshannon near Bundoran, and thus he represents the middle kingdom. Magh Inis was a corruption of Magh Inais, an alternate name for Magh Cétni where the latter Finnabair was situated.²⁷ The three kings reigned in succession, each for seven years, until each had reigned three times or 21 years each. The first of them to die was Aodh Ruadh, who left Macha Mong Ruadh (Red Hair) his only child. Macha claimed her father's turn in the succession, but Dithorba and his sons (in some versions joined by Cimbaeth) replied that they would not deliver the sovereignty to a woman. Macha then fought a battle against and defeated them, and reigned for seven years. Dithorba died and, at the end of Macha's seven years, his sons demanded the kingdom, but Macha fought

25. Kinsella, 6-7.

26. Henry Morris, 'Where was Tor Inis, the Island Fortress of the Formorians?', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. 57, 47-58.

27. Hogan, *Onomasticon*.

another battle against them, and again defeated them. She then took Cimbaeth as her husband and commander of her warriors. She made prisoners of the sons of Dithorba and condemned them to build a fortress for her, to be forever the capital of the province, that is, Emain.²⁸

Cimbaeth is a point of conjunction for history, myth, and archaeology. The historical record says that the tales and history of the Ulaid are uncertain before the time of Cimbaeth. The regnal lengths of the kings of Emain (see below), if trustworthy, indicate that Cimbaeth's era was roughly the first half of the first century B.C. The construction of the *síd brugh* at Emain Macha took place perhaps two decades before the time of Cimbaeth. Together with general aspects of pagan Celtic religion and with the legend of Dithorba, Macha, and Cimbaeth, this conjunction suggests the following.

The *síd brugh* at Emain was an intrusion into this system, being dedicated to a (probably male) sky god and having west- rather than the traditional east-facing aisles. It appears to embody two related elements of social structure: male dominance and a union of tribes. The story of Dithorba and his sons recounts an attempt to impose patrilinear succession on Ulster by the people of south Ulster, whereas matrilinear succession may have been the practice of a large portion of the population, the Cruithni. The construction of the *síd brugh* of the male sky god embodies this concept. At the same time, the legendary sharing of the sovereignty among the three kings represents the union of these diverse peoples. This also is embodied in the *síd brugh* by the use of materials (the earth and turves) from various regions of Ulster. The weathered stones of the cairn may have come not from one earlier monument in the vicinity (as suggested by Lynn) but from the several cairns that previously had represented the gods or goddesses of the individual territories. Such reuse, although frowned upon by reverence and religious tradition, may have been accomplished by 'a powerful elite bent on making a monumental religious statement'. The statement being made apparently was the existence of a new political-religious unity for Ulster, whose kings were to be selected by patrilinearity.

Among the continental Celts, among the multiplicity and mobility of titles and powers of their gods, an underlying structure of oppositions has been detected: male/tribe/sky/war against female/place/earth/fertility. The coupling of the two would produce balance, harmony, and productivity.²⁹ The newly arrived people (or at least cultural contacts) may have brought a perceived necessity to supply the male/tribe/sky/war god to balance the already present female/place/earth/fertility powers of Macha.

Nemed or Nuadu seems to have been the male god for whom the *síd brugh* was constructed, the god of united Ulster. R. B. Warner³⁰ argues strongly that the *síd brugh* was a shrine to Apollo, who in Ireland was represented in one tradition as Conmáel, the god Cunomaglos (hound prince) imported from Britain.

28. Keating, 245-247.

29. Cunliffe, *op. cit.*, 188.

30. Warner, *Emania* no. 14, *op. cit.*

‘Cú Chulainn was his later embodiment in the Ulster Cycle tales.’ In the earliest version of the tale *Tochmarc Emire*, Cú Chulainn, asked his identity, replies, ‘I am Nuadu, of the pestilence that frequents dogs’. (The ‘pestilence’ refers to wild fierceness.³¹) Thus we have an equivalence between Apollo/Cú Chulainn and Nuadu, which is confirmed by their common attributes of hunting, healing, and connection with the sun. Casey notes that Nuadu was an addition to the Irish pantheon, being ‘conceived of as being somehow apart from the other Irish gods’.

The new god, or at least some aspects of what he represented, was rejected. Patrilinear succession was not successfully imposed on the newly unified kingdom. Cimbaeth, and his successors from the various kingdoms, became king of Emain by ritual marriage to Macha.³²

IV. Chronology of the Kings of Emain

There are three sources for the names of the kings of Emain from Cimbaeth to Conchobar Céaim, two of which include regnal lengths. The first list is part of (or perhaps an addition to) what Dr Bartholomew McCarthy identified as tract A, a late sixth-century Latin synchronism that was translated into Middle Irish and is preserved in the fourteenth century *Book of Ballymote*. This list includes regnal lengths, the authenticity of which might be seen in the fact that the author or redactor did not modify them to fit his scheme of synchronism. The regnal lengths (excluding one that is illegible) total 383 years, but the author places their end points at two signposts of classical history, the 18th year of Ptolemy son of Lagos (305 B.C.) and the tenth year of Tiberius Caesar (24 A.D.), a period of only 328 years. The second list is contained in the poem *Cimbaeth cleithe noch nEmna*, written by Eochaid O’Flynn (died 984). This poem does not give individual regnal lengths, but all three existing versions agree that the period from Cimbaeth to Conchobar Céaim lasted 400 years, not far from the total of the individual reigns given in tract A. (The synchronism represented by later portions of this poem will be discussed below.) The third list is embedded in the *Annals of Tighearnach* (died 1088). This list differs from that of tract A, as can be seen in Table 1.³³

31. John Carey, ‘Nodons in Britain and Ireland’, *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* (1984), vol. 40, 1-22.

32. This is a major variation on a suggestion by Frank Battaglia in ‘A Common Background to Lai de Graellunt and Noinden Ulad?’, *Emania* (1993), no. 11, 41-48.

33. For tract A see MacNeill, 1910. The date of original composition of the tract has been contested since he wrote. ‘The Annals of Tigernach’ from Rawlinson B. 502 and Rawlinson B. 488, ed. Whitley Stokes, published in *Revue Celtique* (1895), vol. XVI, 374-419 and (1896), vol. XVII, 6-33.

Table 1, Regnal Lengths of the Kings of the Ulaid

	<i>Tract A</i>	<i>Tighernach</i>
Cimbaeth mac Fintain	28	28
Eochaidh Eolachair	30	20
Uamanchend mac Corrain	20	50
Conchobar Roth mac Cathair	30	30
Fiachna mac Feidlimid	16	16
Daire mac Forgo	71	71
Enna mac Ratha	5	5
Fiach mac Fiadchon	45	65
Finnchad mac Baic	?	2
Conchobar Mál mac Futhi	12	12
Cormac mac Loithig	28	18
Mochta mac Murcorad	3	3
Eochaid mac Daire	5	3
Eochaid Sulbuidhe mac Loich	30	3
Fergus mac Leite	0	12
Conchobar Céaim mac Cathbad	60	60
Total	383	398

Both lists appear to have corruptions in Roman numerals and it is not clear which is correct in some cases – was an x dropped or added? which order (xlv or lxv) was the original and which the transposition? However, it would appear that adjustments were made by Tighernach so that the total time from Cimbaeth to Conchobar was 400 years, consistent with the 400 years cited in *Cimbaeth cleithe*.

Fergus Fogha was the fifteenth king in the list, according to the poem *Cimbaeth cleithe*, or perhaps the fifteenth following Cimbaeth. At least one king has been added to the poem and Tighernach's list. This intruder can be identified as Fergus mac Leti because, first, the list in tract A does not include him at all; secondly, he lived (if at all) no later than Conchobar MacNessa, Conchobar Mál mac Futhi of this list, as will be shown below. He was taken from legend and added to the list to accomodate the later identification of Conchobar Céaim as MacNessa and the story of MacNessa's gaining the throne from Fergus mac Roich or mac Rossa, with whom Fergus mac Leti sometimes is confused.³⁴

The list in Ballymote from tract A is probably the older and better one and will be used in the remainder of this work.

Quatrains 11 through 13 of the poem *Cimbaeth cleithe* deal with Fergus Fogha. Quatrain 11 in the earliest version³⁵ clearly states that Fergus Fogha, the fifteenth king, took Emain from Conchobar. This disagreed with the later

34. For the legend of Fergus mac Leti, which seems to be two stories awkwardly joined together, see *Ériu*, 16 (1952), 33-48.

35. *Book of Lecan* folio 292; considered the oldest based not on linguistics but on textual development.

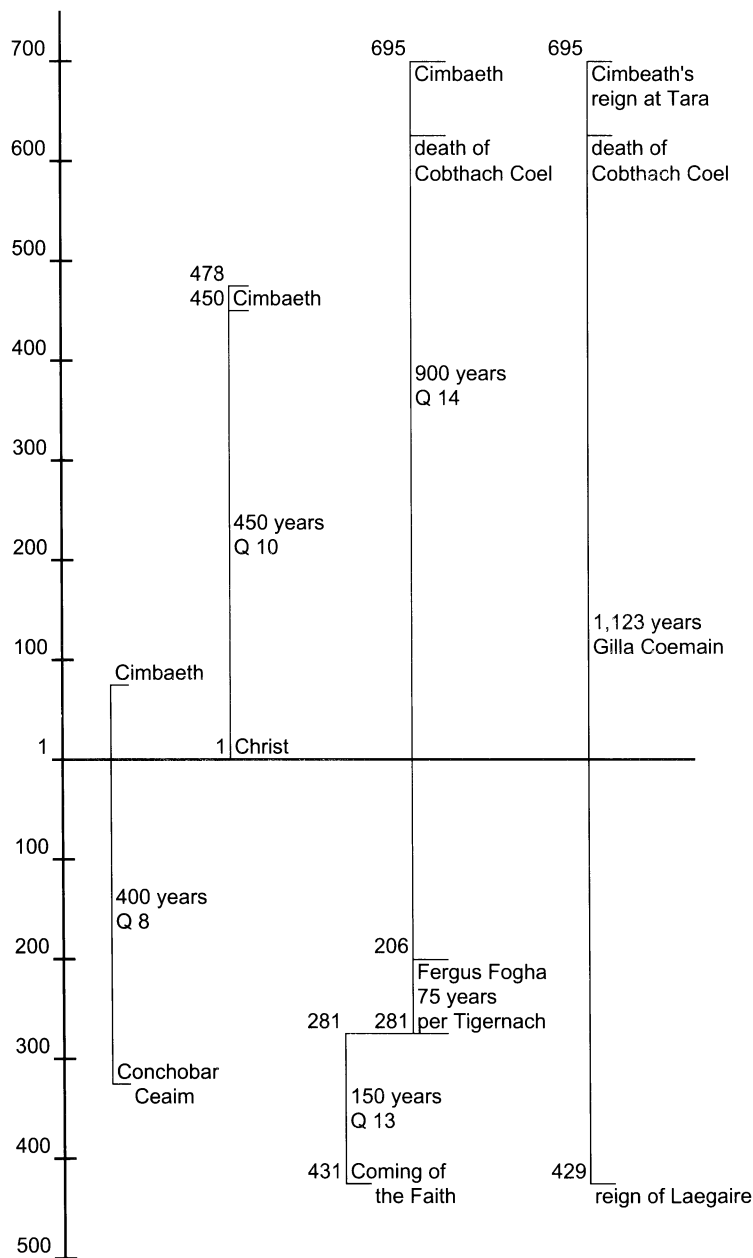


Fig. 3: Synchronisms in Cimbeth Cleithe

synchronisms, so the quatrain was modified just enough in the later versions to allow fifteen kings to take Emain after Conchobar and before Fergus, to add to the years between Christ (and MacNessa, who in the new synchronism is identified as Conchobar Céaim) and Fergus Fogha.

Two very long reigns are given in these lists, those of Daire and Conchobar Céaim; in addition, according to Tighernach, Fergus Fogha reigned seventy-five years. One might question the accuracy of these extended regnal lengths. However, the possibility of very long reigns should be admitted because of the ritual nature of the kingship of Emain, as supported by the example of Conchobar becoming king at age seven and his attitude when Ulster was attacked.

It is highly likely that the kingship of Emain was a ritual, not a political position, and may have been given to very young men, no political or military experience being required. Up to the first centuries A.D. there persisted in Ireland the institution of sacred or fertility kingship. A leading male of a tribe was chosen by the local goddess (that is, her matriarchal or priestess representative) and had kingship conferred upon him by a public mating with her. He possessed ceremonial importance but no political or coercive authority, and would lose his position if a crop failure, violation of *gessa*, or other problem showed that he was out of favor with the goddess.³⁶ A difficult era in which kings were deposed might explain the quick succession of three short reigns, such as Tighernach shows preceding Fergus mac Leiti. Though surrounded by typical legendary material, the *Compert Conchobair* says that Conchobar MacNessa (in this case mac Cathbaid) became king at age seven through the persuasion of his mother, in succession to Fergus mac Roich or mac Rossa; and that he remained king through the wishes of the Ulaid, because of the good things he gave them. The ritual, not civil or practical, nature of the kingship is illustrated by Conchobar's attitude when news of the Táin reached him. His druid replied, when the news was brought by Sualdam, 'This man [Sualdam] is annoying the king. By rights he ought to suffer death'. Conchobar said, 'It would be fitting. ...Still, what Sualdam says is true', and in the end Conchobar sends his son to gather the warriors of Ulster.

None of the three long reigns approaches that accepted for Pharaoh Pepi II, of Egypt's Old Kingdom, who came to his throne at age six and reigned for some 94 years.

In order to tie this series of kings to the early historical records, other sources that name the reigns of their successors must be used. Fergus Fogha had a reign of 75 years, according to Tighernach. His apparent successor, Cronn Badruí, is called by Keating (in his genealogical section) 'king of all Uladh'. 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories'³⁷ and the *Book of Leinster* (330b) give him a

36. Myles Dillon, *The Cycles of the Kings* (Oxford U. Press, 1946); Myles Dillon, 'The Consecration of Irish Kings', *Celtica*, 10 (1973), 1-8; Francis J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London: Batsford, 1973).

37. 'The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories' from Oxford U. MS Laud 610, ed. by Kuno Meyer in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* VIII (hereafter Laud, 610).

reign of 22 years. Cronn's son Caelbach was king of Ulster for 15 years according to Keating, the Laud MS and the *Book of Leinster*. Sarán, Caelbach's son, ruled Ulster for 26 years (according to the Laud MS and the *Book of Leinster*). Sarán was succeeded by Muredach Muinderg. Muredach's reign began somewhere from 452 to 459 A.D., depending on how the sources are used.³⁸ The year 455 is used here as an approximation.

Using these regnal lengths and those from tract A, with the two-year reign of Finnochad mac Becc given by Tighearnach, results in the chronology shown in Table 2.

Table 2, Approximate Reigns of the Kings of the Ulaid

Cimbaeth mac Fintain	69-41 B.C.
Eochaidh Eolachair	41-11 B.C.
Uamanchend mac Corrain	11 B.C.-10 A.D.
Conchobar Roth mac Cathair	10-40
Fiachna mac Feidlimid	40-56
Daire mac Forgo	56-127
Enna mac Ratha	127-132
Fiach mac Fiadchon	132-177
Finnchad mac Baic	177-179
Conchobar Mál mac Futhi	179-191
Cormac mac Loíthig	191-219
Mochta mac Murcorad	219-222
Eochaid mac Daire	222-227
Eochaid Sulbuidhe mac Loich	227-257
Conchobar Céaim mac Cathbad	257-317
Fergus Fogha mac Fraechair	317-392
Cronn Badrai	392-414
Caelbach mac Cruind	414-429
Sarán mac Caelbach	429-455
Muredach Muinderg	455-

This chronology fits well with the conjunction of myth and archaeology in Cimbaeth in the first half of the first century B.C.

V. The Chronology and Synchronism of *Cimbaeth Cleithe noc nEmna*

There are extant three recensions of Eochaid O'Flynn's poem *Cimbaeth cleithe noc nEmna*. In apparent order of age, these are in the *Book of Lecan*, 292, the *Book of Lecan*, 7, and the *Book of Leinster*, 21. The poem has five quatrains that refer to periods of time:

- q. 8 400 years from Conchobar Céaim back to Cimbaeth
- q. 10 450 years to the birth of Christ after Cimbaeth

38. *Annals of the Four Masters. Annals of Ulster. Book of Leinster* 41c. RIA 935, 108.

- q. 13 A period of three times fifty years to Fergus Fogha's battle before the Faith (Lecan 292). Or, fifty years to the battle before the Faith (Lecan 7). Or, six years from the battle to the Faith (Leinster).
- q. 14 900 years from Fergus Fogha back to Cimbaeth
- q. 18 Three times fifty years after Cimbaeth, Labraid slew Cobthach Céol in Dinn Rig (Lecan 292 and Leinster). Or, fifty years after Cimbaeth, Labraid slew Cobthach (Lecan 7).

These five statements cannot be reconciled. The reason is that they represent three different stages of the development of the synchronisms of Irish history. Additions probably were made to O'Flynn's original poem as the new doctrine developed.

The 400 years from Cimbaeth to Conchobar represents the oldest surviving tradition, approximately the regnal lengths preserved in (or perhaps added to) 'tract A'.

The 450 years to the birth of Christ after Cimbaeth represents an early attempt to synchronize the king list of Emain with Classical and Christian chronology. The synchronism of tract A places the beginning of Cimbaeth's reign at 305 B.C. (as stated) or at 350 B.C. (as implied). Keating's chronology, which may be based on early works (though he made some of his own modifications), places Cimbaeth's reign at 497 B.C.

Quatrains 13, 14, and 18 in the Lecan 292 version form a consistent whole that approximates Gille Coemain's eleventh-century catalog of the Kings of Tara.³⁹ The coming of the Faith is taken to be the arrival of Bishop Palladius in 431. This date for Palladius, from the notation of Prosper, was known in Ireland by c 600 A.D.⁴⁰ One hundred and fifty years earlier (quatrain 13) would be the year 281, when Fergus Fogha died. Fergus Fogha's 75-year reign (from Tighernach) then began in 206. Nine hundred years before 206 (quatrain 14) would be 695 B.C. This is a perfect correlation with Gilla Coemain's catalog of kings, not of Emain but of Tara, which places Cimbaeth's accession at Tara at 695 B.C., if Laegaire's reign began in 429 A.D. in agreement with the Four Masters. Quatrain 18's 150 years from Cimbaeth to the death of Cobthach Céol also fits Gilla Coemain's list of kings, with the reigns of Cimbaeth, Macha, Rectaid Rigderg, Ugani Mor, Laegari Lorc, and Cobthach totalling 147 years. In Keating they total 109 and in the Four Masters they total 189 years. At least parts of Quatrains 9 through 18 were eleventh century additions to the poem, not relating to the kings of Emain but relating to the kings of Tara, and written by a partisan of the latter.

The recension in Lecan 7 drops the 'three' from quatrains 13 and 18, which then lack one syllable each. This may have been accidental or, in the case of

39. From the *Book of Leinster*, translated in Todd Lecture Series III (1892), 142 ff.

40. See Tarlach Ó Rafartaigh, 'The Enigma of St Patrick', *Seanchas Ard Mhacha* (1989), vol. 13, no. 2, 9.

quatrain 13, may have been purposeful, when it was realized that 281 was much too early for Fergus Fogha's death. In the end, the later scholars settled on the year 331 or 332 for the battle and his death. This would represent *re da coecait*, a period of two fifties before the coming of St Patrick, retaining the correct meter for the line, but such a version of the poem does not exist today.

The recension in Leinster changes the *tri chaecaid* years of quatrain 13 to .vi. years, pointing to the year 425 for Fergus's battle and death. This will be explained below.

VI. The Fomoraige Struggle Against Nemed

The Fomoraige are an interesting people who almost always are taken to be purely mythological. Their battle of Maige Tuired is usually seen as theomachy only, that is, a battle among the gods with no human counterpart. However, given the unity of the religious and the physical aspects of Celtic life, even as theomachy it should reflect some human event. Stripping away the accretions and myths leaves a core of stories that locate this people in a specific area; and they can be tied to a specific time. T. F. O'Rahilly admitted that their name looked like an old name that the redactors of *Leabor Gabála* put to a new use. There appears to be a reality that underlies their shadowy presence in Irish myth; they fit into the story of ancient Ulster being rewoven here.

The Fomoraige appear in four parts of the cycle of invasions in the *Leabor Gabála*, though under a different name in one part. They oppose Partholon on Magh Itha. They oppose Nemed and his people in Mayo, Dál Riada, and Leinster, especially at Tory Island off Donegal coast, and take the tribute of the people of Nemed at *Magh Cétni na fFomhori* (south of the River Dubh in Sligo). As Fir Bolgs they oppose the people of Nemed in one version of the story of the first battle of (south) Maige Tuired, located in legend near Cong in Mayo. In the Dé Danann legends, the Fir Bolgs oppose the Tuatha Dé Danann and their king Nuadu Airgead-lamh in the first battle of Maige Tuired. The Fomoraige oppose the Dé Dananns at the second battle of (north) Maige Tuired near Lough Arrow in Sligo.

The Fomoraige were located in north Sligo. The Magh Itha where their king Cicol Gregancosach (short-leg) opposed Partholon was probably not that in Donegal but Magh Itha an Indusa, an old name for Magh Ene, between the Erne and the Drowes. Henry Morris⁴¹ demonstrated that the Fomoraige island was not Donegal's Tory but was Dernish, a 115-acre island connected by a strand at low tide to the north Sligo coast. And, as shown by Gerard Murphy,⁴² originally there was only one battle of Maige Tuired, fought by the Fomoraige (not the Fir Bolgs), and its site was Moytirra in Sligo, the plain lying northeast of Lough Arrow. The defeated Fomoraige king fled west to Trag Eothaile, now called Beltra Strand, on Sligo's coast.

41. Morris, op. cit.

42. Gerard Murphy, 'Notes on Cath Maige Tuired', *Éigse*, VII (1953-54), 191-198.



Fig 4: The Fomoraige Homeland

The various enemies of the Fomoraige can be traced back to one people, the Cruithni, as followers of the god Nemed. Both *Flaithiuse hÉrenn* and the 'Irish Nennius' (*Book of Ballymote*, 43a and 203a) call Cruithni, eponymous ancestor of the Cruithni people, a great-grandson of Partholon, thus connecting the first enemy of the Fomoraige to the Cruithni. Nemed's equivalence to Nuadu of the Tuatha Dé Danann is made quite clear by the two stories of the first battle of Maige Tuired (fought by Nemed in one and Nuadu in the other) and by the claimed descent of the Tuatha Dé Danann from Nemed. The Nemedians then can be seen as the Cruithni (perhaps joined

by other peoples) called by the name of a god rather than by the name of their race.

Bringing together details from the various stories of the Fomoraige and the Fir Bolg results in the following. The Fomoraige lived in north Sligo. Under Cicol Gregancosach they fought against the Cruithni on Magh Ene between the Erne and the Drowes, where Cicol fell. Later they were attacked by the Nemedians, who came west across the Shannon and into the wide gap to the northeast of Lough Arrow. Their demand was that the Fomoraige king Eochaid mac Erc deliver up the sovereignty of Ireland to them. The Fomoraige lost this battle and Eochaid fled west to Traig Eothaili, where he was killed.

After Eochaid's defeat and death, Conand (sometimes Conaing) mac Faebur came to power as king of the Fomoraige and spread his influence over western Ulster. Conand had a stronghold on Dernish. Each Samhain, it was said, he took the tribute of the Nemedians (children, grain, and cattle) at Magh Cétni. Conand led his forces into Ulster as far as Lethed lact Moighe at Murbolg in Dál Riada, where he battled the Nemedians. The Nemedians in turn attacked Dernish, destroyed the stronghold, and killed Conand. However, many of the Nemedians were caught upon the strand by the rising tide and drowned; and the fortunes of the Fomoraige were again revived by the arrival of a fleet of sixty ships from Africa commanded by a king named Morc mac Dela. (Until the nineteenth

Table 3. The Long Chronology of Tara

	Baile Chulind c. 750	Baile in Scailie c 910 but current version c 1050	An. Tighernach c 1050	Marianus c1050	Gilla Coeman c 1050	An. Innisfallen c 1215	Keating c 1620	Four Masters 1632
96				[Limits his list to kings from the north.]	Elim 20 yrs		Elim of Ulster 20 yrs 59-79 slain by TT	Elim mac Conra, KU 20 yrs 57-76 slain at Achil by Tuathal
97			Tuathal Techtmair 30 yrs [160] killed by Mal mac Rocharne at Lind an Gabaird in Dal Araidhe		Tuathal 30 yrs	Tuathal Techtmair 30 yrs c 127- [129-159]	Tuathal Techtmair 30 yrs 79- 109 slain by Mal mac Rocharne	Tuathal Techtmair [30yrs] 76- 106 killed by Mal mac Rocharne, KU in Maigh Line at Moín-an-Chatha in DalKraidhe on the hill of Cennaulbha
98					Mal mac Rocharne 4 yrs		Mal of Ulster 4 yrs 109-113 slain by FR	Mal 4 yrs 107-110 slain by Fedlimidh R.
99			Fedlimidh Rechtmair 9 yrs [160-168]		Fedlimidh 9 yrs	Fedlimidh Rechtmair 8 yrs begin betw 154 & 161 [159- 167]	Fedlimidh Rechtmair 9 yrs 113-122, died on his pillow	Fedlimidh Rechtmair [9 yrs] 111-119
100			[Per the 'Will of Cathair Mor' FR was slain by the Flan of Luaignin in battle of Tallin (Bunsr & BB)]		Cathair Ua Cormaic 26 yrs or 3 yrs		Cathair Mor of Leinster, 3 yrs 122-125 slain by Conn Cead Cathach	Cathair Mor [3 yrs] 120-122 slain by Conn CC and the Luaignini of Tara in battle of Maigh Báluga
101		Conn Cetchadach	Conn Cead Cathach 20 yrs [168-187] slain by Tibraid Treach, KU, at Tuagh Annois (or elsewhere)		Conn 20 yrs	Conn Cead Cathach (Annals of Connachnoise say to AD 172)	Conn cead Cathach 20 yrs 125-145 slain by contrivance of Tibraid Treach	Conn Cead Cathach [35 yrs] 123-157 slain by Tibraid Treach mc Mal, KU at Tuagh- Annois (unknown)
102					Conaire 8 yrs		Conair 7 yrs 145-152 fell by Nemed mac Sruib-kenn	Conair [8 yrs] 158-165 fell by Neimhidh mac Sruighsheam
103 Art		Art Oenifer or Art mac Cuind 20 years	Art Aenifer, 32 yrs [187-218] fell at battle of Mag Mucruma by Lugaid MacCon.	60 years total for Conn, Art, and Cormac	Art mac Cuind 30 yrs	Art Oenifer, 33 years begin c 187	Art Aenifer, 30 yrs 152-182	Art [30 yrs] 166-195 fell at Mag Mucrumha by Lugaid MacCon & foreigners
104 MacCon mal- Lugde Logde		Lug mac Cuind 25 yrs	Others say that Lugaid MacCon then reigned 18 years, or 30 years as others say.		Lugaid mac Con meic Lugdaigh 30 yrs		Lugaid mac Con (house of lth) 30 yrs 182-212 assassinated by a poet	Lugaidh MacCon, 196-225 expelled by Cormac
105 mentions Fergus dub detach, battle of Crinne					Fergus Dubdada 1 yr		Fergus Dubh-dedach KU, 1 yr 212-213 slain at battle of Crinna by Cormac	Fergus Dubhdedach mac Imchada of the Dal Fiatach 226 slain at Crinna by Cormac O'Con by the hand of Lugaidh
106 Corbmac		Cormac Ua Cuind 60 years	Cormac O'Conn, 42 yrs [218-258] dethroned by Ulad in 14th and 31st years, died at Cleiteach		Cormac 40 yrs	Cormac Ullada 218, still king c 230	Cormac Ull Fada 40 yrs, 213- 253, died at his house at Tara. Some say Ethro-Taeth- fada dlo Cathair Mor was his wife and Carber's mother	Cormac [40 yrs] 227-266 died at Cleiteach
107					Eochu Gunnat 1 yr		Eochaid Gunnath of Ulster 1 yr 253-254 slain by Lugna mac Ferri or Lugaidh mac Anous mc Ferri	Eochaid Gunnat [1 yr] 267- 268 fell by Lugaidh Meann mac Aenghus, an Ulsterman

	Baile Chuind c. 750	Baile in Scailie c 910 but current version c 1050	An. Tighearnach c 1050	Marianus c1050	Gilla Coeman c 1050	An. Innistailien c 1215	Keating c 1620	Four Masters 1632
108	Corpre	Colpoir Liphechair 60 years	Carbri Lifficair, 25 years mac Fer Corb in battle of Gabra Aibhle	30 yrs	Carpre 26 yrs	[implied]	Carbri Lifficair 27 yrs 254-281 fell by Simoen mc Kerb of Lennstar at Gabra near Tara	Carbri Lifficair [17 yrs] 268- 284 fell by Semen mc Cearb of Fotharta
109			A two-year interregnum is implied, but perhaps should be added to Fiacha		the Fotachs 1 yr		Fathadh Airghnach and Fathadh Cairphach 1 yr 281- 282 FC slain by FA, FA slain at X. Ollairda	Fothadh [1 yr] 285-286 FA slain in battle of Ollairba in Magh Line by Caelite
110	Fiechtrí or Fecho	Flach Rophtine 25 years battles include Cnamroiss	Fiacha Robhtine, 27 yrs [285-320 implies 35] slain by the Collas; the Lagnians say he & brothers & 9 sons fell at Cnamroiss by Brese- bael, King of Lennstar	Fiacha Mullethan 25 years	Fiacha Iarlathach 37 yrs	Fiacha Rophtene c 285	Fiachadh Sabhtine 33 yrs 282-315 fell by the three Collas at battle of Dubh- Comar	Fiacha Sabhtine [37 yrs] 286- 322 slain by the three Collas at battle of Dubhcomar in Croich Rois in Breagh
111		Colla n-Oss (i. Uais) 4 years following Niall Noigiallach	Colla Uais, 4 yrs [320-324]	Collas Roiss 4 yrs, after Eochaid Mugmedon	Colla 4 yrs	[implied]	Colla Uais (Argalla) 4 yrs 315-319 banished by Muredach Trech	Colla Uais [4 yrs] 323-326 expelled by Muireadhach T.
112	Muireadhach	Muredach Trech 40 yrs	Muredach Trech mac FS, 30 yrs [324-356] slain by Caelbad mc Cruind-badh- raidhe at Port Righ os Dabhall	Muredach Trech 4 yrs	Murdach Trech 10 yrs	[implied]	Muredach Trech 33 yrs 319- 352 fell by Caelbach mac Cruinn Badrae	Muireadhach Treach 30 yrs 327-356 fell by Caelbhadh mac Cruinn at Portrigh over Dabhall
113					Coelbad 1 yr		Caelbach mc Cruinn Badrae 1 yr 352-353 slain by Eochaid Mugh-Medon 7 yrs 353-365 died at Tara	Caelbhadh mac Cruinn Badhrae [1 yr] 357 slain by Eochaid M. Eochaidh Muighmhedon [8 yrs] 358-365 died at Tara
114		Eochaig Mugmedon 25 yrs	Eochaig Mugmedon mc MT, 8 yrs [366-] [End of Treatment 2]	Eucha Mugmedon 25 years [366-396] [Ross here]	Eocha Mugmedon 8 yrs Crimthand 13 yrs	[implied]	Crimthan of Munster 17 yrs 360-377 poisoned at Slab- oidh-an-rioh nr Limerick sister	Crimthan mac Fidiach [13 yrs] 366-378 poisoned by his sister
115	Crimthand							
116	Neill or Niall	Niall Noigiallach 27 yrs		Niall 27 yrs	Niall 27 yrs	Niall Noigiallach 17 yrs 378- [395]	Niall Naeil-Ghiallach 27 yrs 377-404	Niall Noigiallach [27 yrs] 379- 405 fell by Eochaid mac Enna Cennsealach at Muir nicht
117		[puts Colla nOss here]		Nathi 60 yrs	Nathi 23 yrs	Nath 1 ^r 26 years 408- 434	Dathi (nephew of Niall) 23 years 404-427 slain in Gaul lightening near the Liffy	Dathi mac Fiachra [24 yrs] 405-428 killed by lightning at Slabh Ealica
118	Loegaire	Loigairi 30 yrs, after Ailill Molt		Loegaire mac Neill 66 yrs		Loegaire mac Neill 27 yrs	Loegaire mac Niall Noigiallach 30 yrs 427-457 killed by lightening near the Liffy	Loegaire [30 yrs] 429-478
119	Ailill	Ailill Molt mac Nathi maic Fiachrach 20 yrs, after Colla		Ailill Molt mac Nathi 20 yrs		Ailill Molt mac Nath-1 ^r 19 yrs	Ollid Molt mac Dathi 20 yrs 459-478 fell at Ocha by Luathadh u.a.	Ollid Molt mac Dathi [20 yrs] 459-478 fell at Ocha by Luathadh u.a.
120	Lugid	Lug mac Loegaire, 26 yrs with Turhal Masgadh between Loigairi & him		Lugaid mac Loegaire 23 yrs		Lugaid mac Loegaire 20 yrs 477-	Lugaidh mac Laegaire 20 yrs 477-	Lugaidh 479-

century the remains of a stone fort or dún stood on the highest part of Dernish. There survived a local tradition that the fairies had a big battle on the strand.)

Eochaid Eolachair, second King of Emain (30 years, 41-11 B.C.), is called Eochaigh Faebur mac Fediagh by Tighernach. The expanded genealogies⁴³ call him Eochaid Eolachair mac Fedaig meic Fomoir. That is, the latter indirectly identify him as a Fomoraige and, with Tighernach's Eochaid Faebur, immediately bringing to mind the Fomoraige leaders Eochaid mac Erc and Conand mac Faebur. If this identification be correct, then one can see in the story of the Fomoraige the story of a civil and religious war in Ulster between Eochaid, King of Emain, with his own people of the far west, the Fomoraige, fighting against the supporters of the new patriarchy and their god Nemed. The claim that the Nemedians or Tuatha De Danann wanted Eochaid to relinquish the kingship of Ireland need not relate to invaders wanting to take over the whole island, as in *Leabor Gabála*, but could relate to a demand that he give up the kingship of Emain because he would not accept the new, invading god.

The stronghold on Dernish presents an interesting possibility, namely that the Fomoraige originally were foreigners, sea-farers as the legends sometimes state, who used the island as a trading outpost. The story that they were from Africa could be true, for Carthaginians had reached Ireland long before, around 450 B.C. The Carthaginians, like their Phoenician ancestors, made a practice of founding trading posts in areas ethnically and politically different from their own, and either remained at these posts intact or in time dissolved. Near the end of the first century A.D., Britain was exporting grain, cattle, gold, silver, iron, hides, slaves, and dogs. Certainly Ireland offered cattle, gold, hides, slaves, and dogs to the trader. Although Carthage was destroyed at the end of the Third Punic War in 146 B.C., seven Carthaginian cities were granted free status and kept their own culture alive as late as the second century A.D., well past 11 B.C., the date indicated here for the battle of Maige Tuired. The name of the king from Africa, Morc, could be a corruption of *mlk*, the Phoenician word for 'king', to which vowels usually are added to form *melek* or *malco*. (Phoenician writing did not include vowels.) Even the name Fomoraige could be of Phoenician origin, for one of the Phoenicians' gods was Pmy, whose origin traces back through the Mediterranean to Cyprus.⁴⁴ The name sometimes is written Pumay, but the Phoenician y usually takes the value of long u. (The early Irish, as is well known, had no letter p.) Usually small p became small c, but in at least one instance became small f when St Patrick's grandfather Potitus was called Fótíd in the Tripartite Life, the chronicle of Marianus Scotus and a poem by Flann Mainistrech. Thus, the Fomoraige could have been the people of Pumu. In Gadir, modern Cadiz in Spain, Pumu was worshipped as late as the year 100 A.D.⁴⁵ The struggle against Nemed then was not just in favor of Macha ('spouse'

43. Laud, 610; *Book of Leinster*, 330b.

44. Maria Eugenia Aubert, *The Phoenicians and the West*, Mary Turton translator (Cambridge, Cambridge U. Press, 1987), 179-180.

45. Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii Tiana* V, 5.

of King Eochaid) but perhaps is more properly seen as a struggle for freedom to worship Pny and not Nemed. The struggle in favor of a foreign god would be the cause of the demonization of the Fomoraige in legend.

VII. Correlation with the Kings of Tara

The efforts of the synchronists culminated in two great works composed near the end of the classical Gaelic era, namely the *History of Ireland* by Revd Geoffrey Keating and the *Annals of Kingdom of Ireland* by the 'Four Masters'. The framework of these compositions is the chronological list of the kings of Tara, called by the synchronists the High Kings of Ireland. The list is made up largely of supposed ancestors of the ruling family, the Uí Niall of the early historical era, but with many kings from other provinces scattered throughout, along with mythological and religious figures. The reigns of these other kings and deities probably were inserted into the list for two reasons: First, for purposes of promoting the ruling house, it was desirable to construct a genealogy of the Uí Niall stretching back many generations. This did not exist, so the scholars took the existing list of kings and turned it into a genealogy, making each succeeding king of Tara of the original list a son of his predecessor. However, in a few instances the regnal lengths were somewhat short to represent father-to-son succession. (Such succession was not the norm in Ireland anyway, as is made apparent both by the surviving list of Ulster kings and by the actual succession within a wider family that is apparent as soon as the early historical period arrives.) To be realistic as a genealogy, the average time from death to death in this list or genealogy had to be lengthened by the insertions. Secondly, these insertions served the desirable purpose of uniting the Irish as a nation by giving each of the peoples and provinces a role in the high kingship.

Table 3 lists the 'Kings of Ireland' as presented in six works, with notes from two others. Two early poems listing the descendants of Conn Cead Cathach who sat upon Ireland's throne are given first, followed by the oldest surviving annals, those of Tighernach. There follow notes from the authors Marianus and Gilla-Coemain and then the *Annals of Innisfallen*. This arrangement provides an overview of the development of the list up to Keating and the Four Masters, whose lists are presented in the last two columns. The table begins no earlier than the reign of Elim, king prior to Tuathal Tectmar, based on O Rahilly's (no doubt correct) conclusion that Tuathal was an invader who founded a new dynasty at Tara and so the kings listed before him may not represent a real dynasty, certainly not his own, at any rate.

The late fifth century kings, working back from known dates, were: Lugaidh mac Laegari, 20 years, 477 to 497; Oilild Molt, 19 or 20 years, 458 to 477; and Laegari mac Niall, 27 years, 431 to 458. Preceding Laegari the later histories place Nath-Í or Dathi, but O Rahilly showed convincingly that Nath-Í does not belong in the list of kings of Tara, being only a king of Connaught.⁴⁶ Laegari

46. *EIHM*, 211-215.

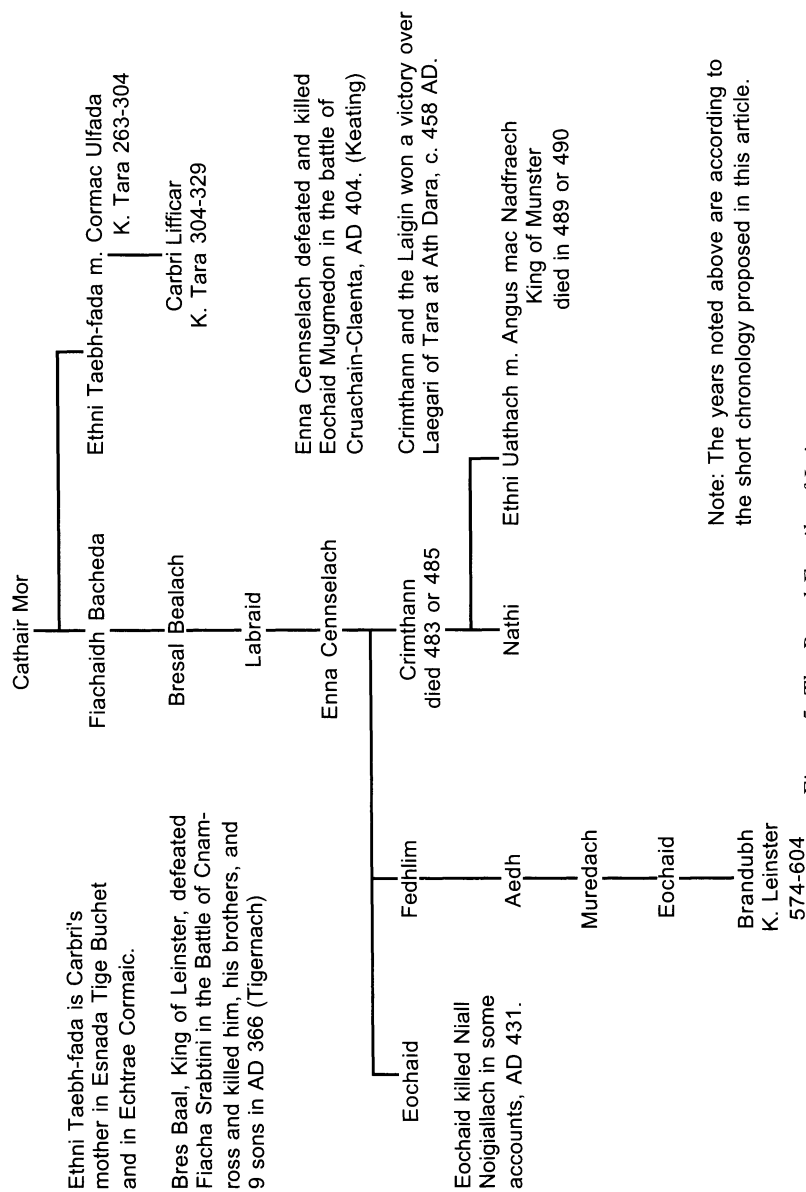


Figure 5. The Royal Family of Leinster

therefore was preceded by his own father Neill Noighiallach for 27 years, 404 to 431. Crimthann of Munster and Caelbach of Ulster both must be deleted from the list, leaving in the fifth century Eochaidh Muigh-Medon, 8 years, 396 to 404.

Based on Table 3, the short chronology of Tara is shown in Table 4, with the kings of other provinces and other persons removed. The lengths of reigns in some cases are too even - multiples of ten, for example - to be taken as exact, but may be seen as approximations written down in later times.

Table 4. The Short Chronology of Tara

<i>King</i>	<i>Length of Reign</i>	<i>Approximate Reign, A.D.</i>
Tuathal Tectmar	30	171-201
Fedlimid Rechtaid	8	201-210
Conn Céad Cathach	20	210-230
Art Oenfer	33	230-263
Cormac Ulfada	(40 or 42) 41	263-304
Carbri Lificar	(27 or) 25	304-329
Fiacaid Srabtni	37	329-366
Muredach Tirech	30	366-396
Eochaid Mugmedon	8	396-404
Niall Noighiallach	27	404-431
Laegari mac Niall	27	431-458
Oilild Molt	(20 or) 19	458-477
Lugaidh mac Laegari	20	477-497

In this chronology, Tuathal Tectmar's reign begins nearly a century later than in the long chronology and about 40 years later than in Tighernach, and he is a contemporary of Conchobar Mál mac Futhi of Emain (Table 2). The early synchronism of tract A places the beginning of the reign of Cormac Ulfada at about 280 A.D., only 17 years later than in Table 4.

The later part of this short chronology finds some support in the history and genealogy of the kings of Leinster, with which five connections are known or claimed. The family is displayed in Figure 5. King Crimthann died in 483 or 485.⁴⁷ Some twenty-five years earlier he and his people defeated King Laegari of Tara in a battle at Ath Dara on the Barrow. (This fits either the short or the long chronology.) Crimthann's brother Eochaid is said in some stories to have killed Niall Noighiallach, an event dated here to the year 431. Crimthann's father and predecessor, Enna Cennselach, provides the next earlier contact with Tara. Keating⁴⁸ says that Enna defeated Eochaid Mugmedon in the battle of Cruachain-Claenta, one of thirteen battles he won over the Clanna Chuin, according to the *Psalter of Cashel*. This would have been impossible under the long chronology, but possible under the short chronology if Enna had a reign of forty years or more. Some genealogies say that Enna's father was Bresal Bealach

47. *Annals of Ulster*.

48. Keating, 368-369.

and the *Annals of Ulster* give Bresal's death year as 435. This would place Enna too late to be coeval with Eochaid Mugmedon. However, the fifth century annals are a reconstruction, a backward look from a later century, so little credence needs be given to an isolated entry such as Bresal's. An alternative pedigree is provided by the Annals of Ulster at the death of King Brandubh in 604, and by other sources, which say that Labraidh was father of Enna and son of Bresal Bealach. This pushes Bresal's death back to long before 435 and the early years of Enna thus could have overlapped with the last years of Eochaid Mugmedon.

Placing Bresal's reign in the fourth century also agrees with the next point of contact with Tara. In his annals, Tighernach reported an alternative to the story of Fiacha Srabaine's death at the hands of the Three Collas. According to the Leinstermen, he said, Fiacha and his brothers and nine sons died at the battle of Cnamross, by the hands of Bres Baal, King of Leinster, who must be identical with Bresal Bealach. A poem in the *Book of Leinster* on the battles of the Lagen includes a similar story.⁴⁹ The short chronology places this battle about the year 366.

There was great confusion in the Leinster history and genealogies. *Comainserad righ Ereann agus rig na cuigedh iar creitim annso* notes that the king who reigned when St Patrick came was 'Bressal Belach son of Fiachna Baicheda in the kingdom of Leinster, or it may have been Crimthann son of Enna *ut alii dicunt*'.

The last point of contact is reported by Keating in his discussion of Cormac Ulfada. Some say, he said, that Ethni Taebh-fada daughter of Cathair Mór was the wife of Cormac and mother of Carbri Lifficar. She appears as such in both *Esnada Tige Buchet* and *Echtrae Cormaic*.

The Earlier Portion of the Tara Chronology

The earlier portion of the list of kings of Tara presents great problems. O Rahilly saw Conn Céad Cathach, Conn Hundred Battles, as purely mythological. Conn's identification as king of Ireland is not supported by its traditional division into Leth Conn and Leth Mogha, Conn's half (the north) and Mogha's half (the south). This division appears by the ninth century in the annals and genealogies, but not in the earlier *Lebor Gabála*.⁵⁰ Nor is the identification supported by the name of the *Connachta*, often said to mean the 'descendants of Conn'. The suffix *-acht* is not a collective but an abstract suffix, so that the name must have meant the 'headship', the 'leadership', from *cond* or *conn*, 'head'.⁵¹ The earliest reference to Conn seems to be the list of the kings of Tara in *Baile Cuind Chetcatchaigh*, copied from the lost, early eighth century *Book of Drum Snechta* and expanded by later

49. *Book of Leinster*, beginning at 43 a 1.

50. *EIHM*, 191-192.

51. David Sproule, 'Origins of the Éoganachta', *Ériu* 35 (1984), 31-37. That abstract nouns ending in *-acht* originally were collectives was stated much earlier by Thurneysen, *Grammar of Old Irish*, sect. 260.

scholars. This poem begins not with Conn but with Art. Conn is mentioned only in the title, and this may be a later addition or change, for the *Vita Tripartita* of about the year 900 or later refers to it not as *Baile Cuind Chetcataigh*, 'Frenzy of Conn Céad Cathach', but *Baile Cuinn*, which could have meant simply Frenzy of Wisdom'. Conn first explicitly appears as king in the later text *Baile in Scail*, 'Frenzy of the Phantom'. This might lead one to the conclusion that Conn was purely an invented, eponymous ancestor based on a misunderstanding of the origin of *Connachta*. However, a different, quite real origin will be suggested for him below.

What then of the kings before Art Óenfer? An alternative to the synchronists' list is provided by the stories of Queen Medb or Maeve, she who was queen at Cruachan in Connaught and antagonist of Ulster in the tales of the Táin. Medb in later versions of her story had two personalities, one tied to Tara and one to Cruachan, but the identity of the two was clear to the author of a genealogical tract preserved in the *Book of Lecan*, which says that 'that woman, Medb Lethderg, cohabited with nine kings of Ireland'.

Medb, it is clear, represented the sovereignty at Tara, just as Macha did at Emain, and recognition of kingship in the politico-religious world required marriage to her. Medb Cruachna was married to (1) Conchobar MacNessa of Ulster. She forsook him, however, and went to Tara. (2) Tinde mac Connrach Cas of the Fir Domnan (of Leinster), after some contention, married Medb; he ruled not from Tara but from Cruachan in Connaught. (3) Eochaid Dala of the Fir Chrábe (of Connaught) became king of Connaught with Medb's consent and hand. Her best-known husband was (4) Ailill, king of Connaught. Ailill was son of Ross Ruad of Leinster and Máta of Muireasc of the Ernai and of the Fir Olnecmacht, the people of what came to be Connaught. (5) The Divine Fergus mac Roich of Ulster was her favourite consort. As Medb Lethderg, daughter of Conán Cuallan, Queen of Leinster, she consorted with (6) Cú Corb⁵² mac Mugh Corb and bore two sons to him. She 'cohabited with [7] Fedlimid Rechtmar after he had slain Cú Corb in battle and the place and venue of their cohabitation is east of Tara, namely Rath Medba; and she was wife also to [8] Art mac Conn and to [9] Cormac mac Airt meic Cuind after Art had banished MacCon from Tara'. She would not allow a king in Tara without having her as wife.⁵³

Reserving many details for a future article, equivalences between the 'Kings of Tara' and the 'Consorts of Medb' are presented in Table 5. To gain insights on this possibility it is necessary to return to the kings of Emain and the stories and identity of Conchobar MacNessa.

52. O Rahilly (*EIHM*, 138-140) took Cú Corb to be the equivalent of the Lagenian Carbri Nia Fer, who was, he said, the origin of Carbri Lificar. This serves to point out that much remains to be considered regarding the 'kings of Tara' and the origin of the Uí Niall.

53. Ó Máille, op. cit. Ó Raithbheartaigh, *Genealogical Tracts*, I/147-148.

Table 5. Equivalences between the Kings of Tara and the Consorts of Medb

<i>Kings of Tara</i>	<i>Consorts of Medb</i>	<i>Other/Comments</i>
Conchobar Abrat Ruadh	Concobhar MacNessa	
Carbri Cenn Cait	Cu Corb	Carbri Nia Fer
Elim mac Conraigh	Tinne mac Conraigh Caiss	
Tuathal Tectmar	Eochaid Dala	Dabal Dianbuillioch
	Ailill mac Mata	events of Tuathal's reign
Mal mac Rocraide	Fergus mac Roich	both represent MacNessa
Fedlimid Rectmar	Fedlimid Rectaid	
Art Oenfer	Art Oenfer	
Cormac Ulfada	Cormac Ulfada	

VIII. The Identity and Chronology of Conchobar MacNessa

There is a basic disagreement between the records that claim to be historical, on the one hand, and those that are legendary, on the other, as to the identity of the famous Conchobar MacNessa, King of Emain. Keating identifies his father as Factna Fathach, whereas many (but not all) versions of the Táin cycle identify the father as Cathbad the druid. It is a conclusion of this paper that the tenth king in the Emain dynasty, Conchobar Mál mac Futhi, not the sixteenth, Conchobar Céaim mac Cathbaid, was Conchobar MacNessa.

According to the genealogies, Conchobar MacNessa, mac Factna *Fathach*, was a second cousin and so a near contemporary of Elim mac Conraigh, one of the (supposed) Ulstermen whom the synchronists called a King of Ireland. *Mal* mac Rocraide of Ulster, although the expanded genealogies place him some twelve generations later, also was a near contemporary of Elim, according to the synchronists' catalogue of the Kings of Ireland. The tenth king of Emain, Conchobar *Mál* mac *Futhi*, has similar elements of both of their names in his. It seems obvious that these three are representations of the same person in three different traditions, his full name having been Conchobar Mál MacNessa, mac Factna Fathach. Conchobar Mál mac Futhi was remembered by those keeping the list of kings of Emain; Mál mac Rocraide was remembered in North Leinster, Rocraide representing his membership in the Clanna Rudraighe; and Conchobar mac Factna Fathach was remembered in a third tradition, drawn upon by Keating, perhaps the *Psaltar of Cashel*.

Factna Fathach was said to have reigned at Tara for sixteen years, but this is a fiction of the synchronists. He was said to be a nephew of Bresal bo-dibadh (cow-plague). Bresal was said by the synchronists to have been king at Tara for eleven years, and to have been slain by Lugaid Luaigni. Gilla Coemáin calls Bresal King of Cualnge. The owner of the Brown Bull of Cualnge, cause of the Táin, was Daire mac Factna and so perhaps originally was a half-brother of Conchobar. Conall Anglonnach, eponymous ancestor of the Conalli Murtheimne, in one genealogy is given an ancestor Factna mac Senchaid. This family then was tied to Cualnge in many records and probably was Cruithni.

Also indicating the Cruithni origin is the fact that Conchobar was known by the name of his mother, Ness.

In the versions of the Táin that say MacNessa was son of the druid Cathbad, the existence of stories to the contrary is implied in the words, 'The boy was reared by Cathbad and was known as Cathbad's son'. The switch in identity of MacNessa from Conchobar Mál mac Factna to Conchobar Céaim mac Cathbad probably was made when the chronology was stretched back in time and fifteen kings were inserted between Conchobar mac Cathbad, the 'new' MacNessa, and Fergus Fogha.

Eoin MacNeill pointed out that in the 'heroic period' Leinster comprised two of the provinces of Ireland. North Leinster, Lagin Tuath Gabair, known as Cairbre's Fifth, represented the kingdom of the Luaigni, with their capital at Tara, together with the valley of the Liffey. South Leinster, Lagin Des Gabair, was led by the Galeoin, with their capital at Dinn Riogh on the Barrow. The boundary between the two seems to have been the valley between Sliab Mairge and the Wicklow mountains, i.e. in the south of County Kildare.⁵⁴

The Luaigni in the early historical period were known as the *sentuatha Temrach*, the old-people of Tara, and had by then been reduced to vassal status as defenders of Tara against all the king's enemies. The legends say that Conchobar made war on these men of North Leinster in revenge after the Táin bo Cualngi. He was opposed by the forces of the Luaighni at Rosnaree on the Boyne. After a protracted battle the Luaighni abandoned the field. By this war, Conchobar extended Ulster's southern boundary from the Boyne to the Rye (a tributary of the Liffey).⁵⁵ The new territory included Tara. Keating calls this 'all the land that lies from Tara, and from Loch-an-Coigi in Breagh to the sea, a territory that contained three entire tricha-ceads of land...'.⁵⁶ MacNessa, a traditional king who knew the ways of the land, no doubt 'married' Medb Lethderg of Tara after this victory. However, since Conchobar was the first consort of Medb, this victory occurred prior to the war that came to be represented by the Táin.

Elim mac Conraigh from Ulster, Conchobar's supposed second cousin, precedes Tuathal Tectmar in the long list of the kings of Tara and was killed by Tuathal Tectmar in battle at Achill (the hill of Screen near Tara; now spelled Achall).⁵⁷ He perhaps originally was the same person as Tinde mac Conraigh of the Fir Domnan, who followed Conchobar as consort of Medb Cruachna. Conrach could represent Cu Roi, the hero of the Erainn (including the Luaigni), implying that Elim/Tinde was from neither Ulster nor the Fir Domnan but was from the Luaigni.

54. Eoin MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History* (Dublin, M. H. Gill & Son, 1937), 104-106; MacNeill, 1911, 91.

55. MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History*, 80. O'Curry, op. cit.

56. Keating, 278.

57. Keating, 293, 297.

Tuathal Tectmar was an invader, perhaps from Alba (Britain), who was joined by two warrior bands of the Laigín. They conquered the Fir Domnan, the Galeoin, the Liguine and the Fir Bolg or Luaigni.⁵⁸ The desertion of the Luaigni to Tuathal, together with the list of Medb's consorts and Tuathal's next actions against Conchobar, seems to indicate that mac Conraigh was not a Leinsterman but was an Ulsterman who had been placed at Tara by Conchobar. Tuathal, having taken North Leinster, proceeded north of the Boyne against Ulster. It was said that he built Tailti or Taitin in Meath, in the southern of the three Ulster kingdoms. He carried the invasion still farther and is represented in Ulster tradition as Daball Dianbuillioch (the hard-smiter), son of the King of Lochlen, who 'had come to make a conquest of Ireland... The clans of Rudraide mustered round Conchobar, in order to do battle against those strange pirates... and then they fought the battle, and vanquished the sea-robbers, and slaughtered their host'.⁵⁹ The battle was fought at Aenach Macha near Emain. An echo of this battle perhaps has survived in some versions of the Táin. A brave Ulster warrior, Aengus son of Aenlám Gaibe, is said to have opposed the invading host (of Ailell and Medb) at Muid Loga, near the present town of Louth. And 'if they had agreed to single combat the whole army would have fallen at his hands before they came under the sword at Emain Macha'.⁶⁰

The Tara tradition of this war says that Mál mac Rochraid killed Tuathal Tectmar at the hill over Glenn-an-Gabaun in Magh-Line (or at Lind an Gabund in Dál Araide). Keating calls the hill Kenn-Guba, i.e. the hill [head?] of grief, now Ballyboley Hill, Kilwaughter Parish, Co. Antrim.⁶¹ The sparse accounts leave us with many questions. Had Tuathal made an end-run around the Ulster defenses, coming in from the sea at Larne Lough? Was he attacking the Cruithni capital at Magh-Line? Was he retreating from battle at Aenach Macha when caught and killed by the Ulaid? The sequence of events can be outlined as follows:

- Conchobar MacNessa took Tara from the Luaghni in the battle of Rosnaree. This could have been as King of Cualnge, prior to his becoming King of Emain.
- Capbri Cenn Cait/Cu Corb/Carbri Nia Fer led his rebellion of the rent-paying people (the Luaigni) and drove away the Ulaid.
- He was succeeded by Mac Conraigh, another Luaigni king.
- Tuathal Tectmar/Eochaid Dala invaded, gathered allies, killed Mac Conraigh and took the kingship.
- Tuathal invaded Ulster and was defeated near Emain. This war is represented by the Táin. On this or a subsequent invasion of Ulster he was killed by Conchobar's people.

58. *EIHM* 154-5.

59. Keating, 278-9.

60. Kinsella, 164.

61. Keating, 306.

The upheavals in North Leinster throughout his era must have been confusing. Cathair Mór of Leinster, inserted by the synchronists as King at Tara after Fedlimid Rechtmar, was said to have been killed at the battle of Magh hAgha by the Luaigni of Tara (and by Conn Céad Cathach); and Fedlimid Rechtmar, according to the 'will of Cathair Mór', was slain by the Luaigni in battle at Tailtin. These stories may reflect the last attempts of the Luaigni to regain their position as independent rulers of Tara.

IX. The Kings of Emain from Cimbaeth to Fergus Fogha

In the following listing of the kings in Table 2, the length of reign given by tract A is indicated, along with the approximate calendar years established above. Kings for which no additional comments can be made are not repeated here.

1 - Cimbaeth mac Fintain, 28 years, 69-41 B.C.

He died of a plague at Armagh (Keating, 245), though Armagh did not exist as a town then. His residence was at Finnabair of Magh Inis.⁶² As pointed out above, this probably was Finnabair (later Fennor) near Bundoran in the Magh Inis that was more commonly called Magh Ene. A less likely site is Finnabair in Cualnge, which lacks any connection with a Magh Inis.

2 - Eocho Eolachair, 30 years, 41-11 B.C.

As explained above, he possibly can be identified with King Eochaid of the Fomoraigne. One can see this 'husband of Macha' fighting for his own god against the supporters of Nemed.

6 - Daire mac Forgo, 71 years, 56-127

Daire was a mythological ancestor of the Dáirine, which included the Dál Fiatach in Ulster and the Síl Lugdech in Munster. Whether this king was that ancestor is doubtful, but during or just after his long reign the information presented by Ptolemy, including the tribal name of Darine would have been gathered.

7 - Enna mac Ratha, 5 years, 127-132

Enna provides a link with the kings of Clogher, as will be mentioned below.

10 - Conchobar Mál (king, prince, or noble) mac Futhi, Conchobar MacNessa, 12 years, 179-191

As described above, he probably was civil king of Cualnge for many years before marrying Macha. As such he won North Leinster at the battle of Rosnaree. As King of Emain he defeated Tuathal when he brought an army to Emain and he killed Tuathal in Magh Linne.

In the legends it is commonly stated that Conchobar MacNessa was at odds with

62. O'Curry, op. cit., 70, from *Book of Leinster*, fol. 10, b, a.

63. Hogan, *Onomasticon*, 64.

Eogan mac Durthacht, King of Fernmaig. Fernmaig was roughly the border area of present western Monaghan and eastern Fermanagh and from the descriptions of the three kingdoms of Ulster was nominally a subject *tuath* of the middle of the Ulster kingdoms, that later represented by Cualnge where, it was suggested above, Factna Fathach originated. It seems that Conchobar Mál mac Factna Fathach died in battle against this King of Fernmaig. Within the Táin is buried a legend according to which, during Cúchulainn's youth, the Ulaid were defeated by Eogan of Fernmaig and Conchobar and his son Cúscraid Menn were left for dead. Cúchulainn (elsewhere identified with the healing god Apollo) found Conchobar in what sounds like a grave: 'in a trench, with earth piled up on all sides...', took him to a house, kindled a fire, and cooked him a boar so that he 'might come back to life'. The king had to be revived in the legend because, MacNessa by then having been identified as Conchobar Céaim mac Cathbaid, he still had many years to reign after this battle. The Táin goes on to relate that Conchobar's own weapons and chariot were then given to Cúchulainn — in the original, the dead king would have needed them no longer and they could be given to the hero (or offered to the god).

Conchobar died at Coill Lamhriugh in the territory of Ros (roughly today's border area of Monaghan and Louth).⁶⁴ Lying midway between Cualnge and Fernmaigh, perhaps this was the site of the battle between Conchobar and Eogan of Fernmaigh.

Conchobar MacNessa's perhaps most famous son, Forbaid of the legends of the Red Branch, is represented in the expanded genealogies of the synchronists as Ferb mac Mál, thus adding a minor note of confirmation to the identification of MacNessa with Mál.

14 - Eochaid Sulbuidhe (yellow heel) mac Lóc (Loich), 30 years, 227-257

His residence was at Cathair Bóirché in Mourne in south Co. Down. It was destroyed by Conghal Claringneach, who was said to be a son of Rudraidhe Mor. The location of his house and his enmity with the Clanna Rudraighe, if true, imply that Eochaid belonged to the Dál Fiatach. (The late genealogies claim him for neither the Dál Fiatach nor the Cruithni.)

Sulbuidhe's daughter was said to have been Nessa, mother of Conchobar, (O'Curry, 636) but Keating says that Nessa's father was of Connaught, not of the Dál Fiatach. In a matrilineal society, such as is implied by Conchobar being known by his mother's name, it would have been Nessa's mother's status that was important, not her father's. This implies that the identification of her father as Eochaid Sulbuidhe may be relatively late. This would have come from the identification of Conchobar Céaim, the next king after Sulbuidhe, as MacNessa.

15 - Conchobar Céaim mac Cathbaid, 60 years, 257-317

Several Ulster kings are mentioned in conjunction with Cormac Ulfada of Tara, who would be contemporaries of Conchobar Céaim. In the short chronology of

64. Keating, 273.

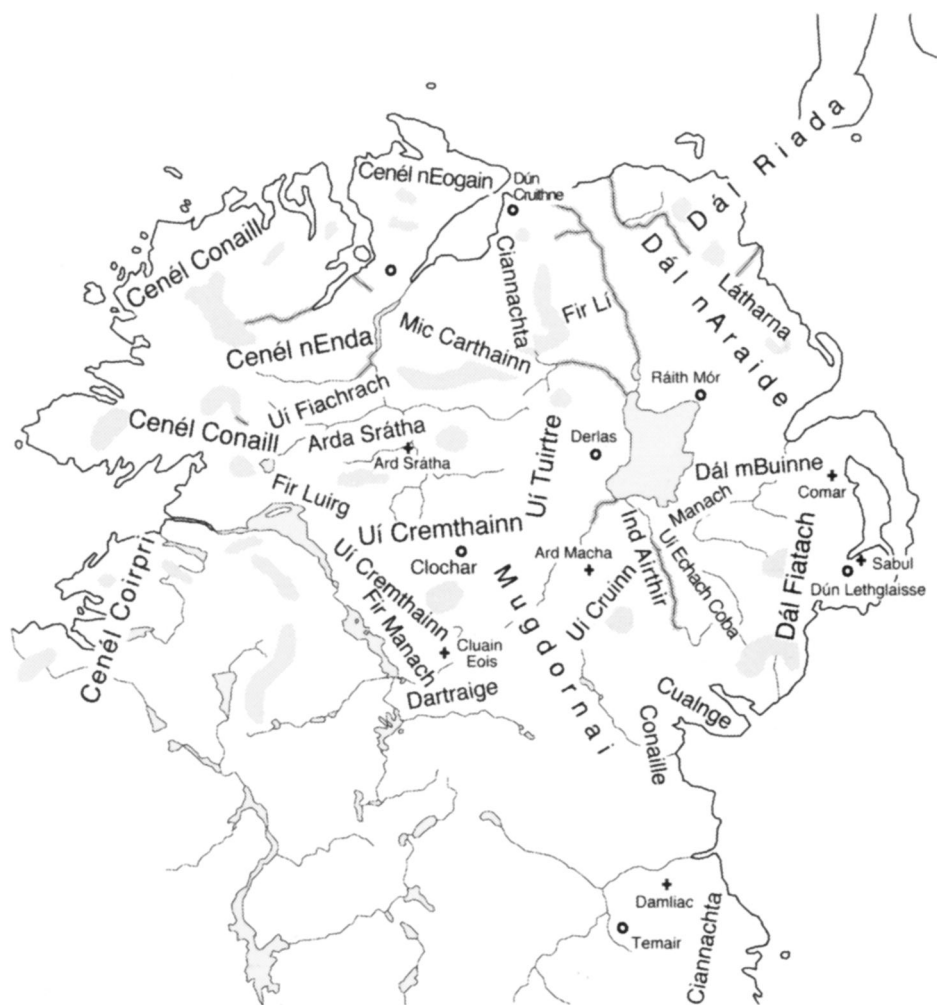


Fig. 6: Sixth Century Ulster

Tara, Cormac reigns ca 263 to 304 A.D. About the 12th year of Cormac Ulfada (per Innisfallen), he and a king of Munster fought the Battle of Fochairt Muirthemne against the Cruithni and their king Fiachaich Ariade. This would have been while Conchobar Céaim was king of Emain (ca 257 to 317) – Conaille was under attack by Cormac, but Conchobar left the defense to the Cruithni of Conaille.

Much later in Cormac's era three other kings of Ulster are mentioned: Fergus Dubhdedach, Angus Finn, and Eochaid Gunnat, all belonging to the Dál Fiatach. Cormac (or the men of Brega) defeated and killed Fergus Dubh-Dedach and his two brothers Fergus Cas-Fiaclach and Fergus Foit-lebar at Brugh-mic-an-aigh at Crinna-Chinn-Cumain (on the Boyne near Stackallan Bridge). The Ulaid were pursued from Ath Crinna to Glas-an-Era on the side of Drom-Innasglainn (Drumskin, Co. Louth). Tighernach has Fergus Dubhdedach's son Angus Find slain fighting against Cormac at the battle of Crinna, after a one-year reign at Emain, while the Four Masters place Angus's battle at Crinna-Fregabhail. Some argue, perhaps correctly, that the three brothers Fergus were purely mythological.

Eoin MacNeill infers that in the battle of Crinna, Cormac took Tara, the old capital of North Leinster, from the Ulstermen. He infers this⁶⁵ from the story that, after the battle of Crinna, Cormac gave his ally Tadg mac Cian whatever lands he could travel around in his chariot, and Tadg tried but failed to include Tara in the circuit. The inference is that these lands were won by the preceding battle. This story is seen by most as a myth invented to explain the origin of the Ciannachta, a Munster family, in north eastern Leinster. Whether or not the battle took place, and whether or not it involved Cormac seizing Tara, the list of consorts of Medb indicates that Tara had been in the hands of his dynasty since the time of Fedlimid Rechtmar.

In addition to the battles of Fochart Murtheimne and Crinna, others between Cormac and the Ulaid are mentioned, such as Granard, Shrule, and Ath-Betha, but no details are provided. In this series of battles, Cormac succeeded in wresting away from the Ulstermen most of whatever remained to them of the old southern kingdom of Ulster that had extended to the Boyne. If this chronology be correct, it was the ritual king Conchobar Céaim who reigned during this time of misfortune.

16 - Fergus Fogha mac Froichir Foirthriuín, 75 years, 317-392

Fergus was immediate successor to Conchobar Céam mac Cathbair, according to the earlier version of *Cimbaeth Cleithe nóc nEmna*. In lines that may have been added later, it says that he was slain in front of his royal castle, in battle against the Three Collas in Fernmaigh. He is said to have been of the Cruithni.

His long reign coincided with a period of agricultural prosperity brought about by the introduction of the coulter-plow. The coulter, a vertical iron knife,

65. MacNeill, *Phases of Irish History*, 120.

was fitted to the front of the plow so that it could cut through roots, allowing the share to break the soil much deeper and more efficiently than could plows not so fitted. This efficiency brought new lands into production.⁶⁶ The epithet Fogha means either a javelin or dart or, as a variant of *fobha*, an attack. Perhaps coincidentally, a related word is *fobhach*, meaning ‘act of cutting, breaking up of the soil, digging’.

Fergus may have been king of more than Ulster. The Cruithni in Alba, the Picts of Scotland, had a long list of their kings that stretched far back into the prehistoric period.⁶⁷ It is generally agreed today that the list as far back as the sixth century Brude mac Maelcon has historical value, because the existence of some of the kings can be verified in other records. The best versions of the list name thirty-two kings before this Brude and of these the names and regnal lengths of the fourteenth through the thirty-second cannot be verified but have the appearance of reality. The reign of the twentieth king, Talorc, is placed in the fourth century, like Fergus Fogha’s reign. In the earliest version of the lists, Talorc’s reign was seventy-five years, like that of Fergus, and his father was Aithuir or Achiuir, not very different from Fergus’s father Froichir, given how corrupt the Pictish list became through copying. If these two kings are taken to be the same man, the difference in ‘given’ names can be explained by the use by the Picts of ‘throne names’, names assumed upon becoming king, a practice not uncommon among royalty throughout history. The use of such names by the Picts in later centuries seems sure, since Pictish kings who were sons of Saxon, Scottish, and British fathers all appear in the lists with Pictish names. Froichir’s epithet (Fortriuín, Fertruín), as given in *Cimbaeth Cleithe*, may point to a connection with the Pictish kingdom of Fortrenn.

Talorc’s predecessor on the throne was Gartnait Diuperr (wealthy). It is tantalizing that his reign is given as sixty years, matching that of Fergus’s predecessor Conchobar Céaim in Ulster, but there seems to be nothing else to tie Gartnait to Conchobar.

Fergus, at least, could have been one of the Cruithni kings who ruled in both Scotland and Ireland, as claimed by the Pictish Chronicle. The largest part of Fergus Fogha’s era, at least from the lack of traditions of war, seems to have been relatively peaceful. The end of his career and his kingdom will be discussed further below.

X. The Kings of Clogher and Middle Ulster

The Clogher Valley in ancient times was called Magh Lemna (Elm Plain). The valley is bounded on the north by a range of hills, in the center of which stands Knockmany or *Cnoc mBane*. There stands a cromlech over the reputed grave of Báine, the goddess of the valley. Two miles south of Knockmany is Clogher or Raith Mór Maighe Lemna, the great fort of Magh Lemna, which Báine is said to

66. Liam de Paor, *The Peoples of Ireland: from Prehistory to Modern Times* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 37.

67. William F. Skene, *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots...* (Edinburgh, 1867).

have built. It stands at an important site, the junction of ancient roadways, for Magh Lemna was one of the few easily traveled east-west valleys in Ulster. To the east, at Augher, is an important ford of the Blackwater (the Abhainn Mór, earlier the Daball), while to the west the ancient road divides, one route following the valley into southwest Ulster and another turning north.

The only story related of Clogher itself in ancient times is an attempt to explain the name as Cloch-Óir, golden stone. According to the simple account, the king in St Patrick's time kept in his courtyard a large stone, a famous idol, covered with gold, which was said to have been an oracle. A fifteenth century manuscript calls the devil who formerly spoke from the stone 'the chief idol of the north', Cremand Cestach. The stone still existed in the church at Clogher at that time.⁶⁸ Excavations of the south end of this ancient site in 1969, 1971, and 1972 revealed that a small fortification was built about the fifth century B.C. of stone walls strengthened by transverse timbers, a British construction method used nowhere else in Ireland. In time this fortress was allowed to deteriorate. Some think the name Clogher or 'stony place' came from its ruins. In the second half of the first century A.D. a new hillfort was built around the ruins, only to be abandoned in the early second century. Artifacts found on the site seem to indicate that not only the builders but the occupants of both of these first phases were from Britain. (This is only part of the story, for the northern half of the site, where the royal residence and Christian monastery later stood, now occupied by the town and the cathedral, may have had equally important ancient structures.)⁶⁹ Clogher may have been the town of Regia mentioned by Ptolemy.

In the list of the 'kings of Tara' is preserved what may be the record of the dynasty of the middle Ulster kingdom, centered on this important site.⁷⁰ This list of kings was moved back in time by the synchronists; was made to be a series of fathers and sons; and was made to be the remote lineage of the kings of Munster. The resulting lineage contains a wild and improbable mix of Ulster and Munster references, though overall the Ulster references predominate. The list has three possible points of contact with the kings of Emain and, although no regnal years are available, its length seems to imply a beginning in the first century B.C., contemporary with Cimbaeth of Emain. The kings' names and the few facts reported of them follow, along with comments on their synchronization with the kings of Emain. Stereotypical references to these kings killing their predecessors or being slain by their successors are omitted.

1. Rothectach was burned by lightning at Dun Sobarki (Dun Severick in Antrim). It was claimed that he descended from Conmael mac Eber, sixth

68. Whitley Stokes, ed., *Féilire Oengusso Céili Dé, The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London, Harrison & Sons, 1905), xiii and 136-137.

69. R. B. Warner, 'Clogher: An Archaeological Window on Early Medieval Tyrone and Mid Ulster' in *Tyrone: History and Society*, Charles Dillon and Henry A. Jefferies, eds. (Dublin, Geography Publications, 2000), 39-54. See also R. B. Warner, 'The Excavations at Clogher and their Context', *Clogher Record*, vol. VIII, no. 1 (1973), 5-12.

70. Keating, 236-242, 248.

- king of Ireland in the late synchronisms. Conmael died in battle at Aenach Macha and was buried at Fert Conmail on the south side of that plain, perhaps on the hill still called Drumconwell. R. B. Warner has seen an equivalence between Conmael and the British god Apollo Cunomagus. What is important here is not the identity of Conmael but the strong connection with Ulster.
2. Elim Olfinechta ('great white snow') fell in the battle of Comair Trí nUisce, the confluence of the Suir, the Nore, and the Barrow, near Waterford.
 3. Art Imlech
 4. Bress Righ, Royal Bress, was slain at Carn Conluain. The site is unknown, but Edmund Hogan guessed that it might be north of Sliabh Baune in County Roscommon, the home of the Corcu Conluain.⁷¹ Keating says that Bresrigh vanquished the Fomoraige in many battles. The alignment of this series of kings as here proposed places Bress roughly coeval with Eochaid or Uamanchend at Emain and Conand mac Eochaid at Dernish, in the time of the war between the Fomoraige and the Nemeditians, described in Section VI above. In the legends of the Battle of Magh Tuiredh, Bress has divided loyalties. He is son of a Fomoraige father and a De Danann (i.e. Nemeditian) mother; he was king of the De Dananns but was displeasing to them and in the end fought against them. Bress Righ's circumstances can fit this legend. He could have inherited the middle kingdom from a Cruithni mother and as king joined the Nemeditians in the campaign against Eochaid. Later, his loyalty to his father's Fomoraige family could have brought him to assist Conand to recover from Eochaid's defeat and to carry his war against the followers of Nemed as far into the northeast as Lethad lact Moighe in Dál Riada.
 5. Sedna Innaraigh (of the wages) was said to be the first king that gave wages to soldiers in Ireland.
 6. Duach Finn (white) was killed in the battle of mMáge (unknown). He was called King of Clár, perhaps a scribal error for Clochar that led the synchronists to connect this dynasty with Munster. If so, then it could be that the first century reconstruction at Clogher may be attributed to him. On the other hand, *clár* means plain, and was used as such in the name *Cruithen-chlár*, the Plain of the Cruithni, so some Ulster plain may have been his kingdom.
 7. Enna Derg (red) died of a plague at Sliab Mis, with great troops in his company. This could have been either the mountain in County Antrim or the one in Kerry. Assuming that Rothectach was about coeval with Cimbaeth, then this Enna Derg would be about coeval with Enna mac Ratha, King of Emain. It is possible that the same Enna filled simultaneously (or successively) a civil or ritual kingship at Clogher and a ritual kingship at Emain.

71. Hogan, *Onomasticon*, 160.

8. Lugaid Iardonn was slain at Raith Clochair. His violent death there may mark the abandonment of the site in the early second century that has been established by archaeology.
9. Eochaid Uarkeas
10. Lugaid Lámhderg (red hand or red arm). According to one story, Lugaid Lámhderg mac Léti was king of Dál Araide (i.e. the Cruithni) during part of Conchobar MacNessa's reign.⁷²
11. Art reigned in Caindruim. The editor of Keating's work places Caendrum at Uisneach, which during MacNessa's reign was part of Ulster.⁷³ Most place Caendrum at Tara, which was won by Ulster during MacNessa's reign but later was lost to Tuathal Tectmar.
12. Olild Finn was slain at Odba by Argetmar. Odba was in Meath, but there also was a moat of the same name near Emain.
13. Eochaid also was slain by Argetmar, at the fair of Ani-Cliath in Munster. Gille Coemain makes Eochaid King of Carmon, Clair, and Cliach, in Wexford and Limerick.
14. Lugaid Laghdi. This Lugaid provides links with several strands of pre-history and focuses them in the second half of the 3rd century. (This was not noticed soon enough to be explored here.)
15. Rechtaid Righderg ('red king') was King of Clochar and Cend Maige [-Lemna].

The list logically should end with the conquest of Clogher by the three Collas, but, if the correlations with Emain proposed above be correct, it appears to be short by one very long reign or two or more short ones. It may be that Rechtaid Righderg was followed by Fergus Fogha, the king of Emain who claims a seventy-five year reign; like his proposed predecessor 'Enna Derg mac Ratha' he could have been both civil or ritual king of the middle kingdom and ritual King of Emain. Incidental facts that support this will be mentioned below.

XI. The Origin of the Three Collas

The story of the Three Collas, conquerors of a large part of Ulster, is a myth in the proper sense of the term, that is, it explained to the mediaeval Irish why things were as they were. (This does not mean that the trio did not exist.) The story is presented in Laud MS 610, Rawlinson B502, the *Book of Leinster*, and the *Book of Ballymote*, all of which versions are similar, and in the *Book of Lecan*, a slightly modified version. Keating's history contains a version, and the last in the traditional form was a copy made in the *Book of Knockninny* in 1718. A short version in English was written about 1719 by John Dolan. The version in Laud 610 was published (untranslated) in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, volume viii (317-319) and that in Rawlinson B502 was translated by M. A. O'Brien and published in the 1939 *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*.

72. O'Curry, op. cit.

73. Keating, 143 n 29.

Based on linguistics, M. A. O'Brien determined that the story was written down about the year 900, 'and in all probability is based on sound tradition'.⁷⁴ We may reasonably speculate that it was written by the same monks of Drum Snat (at Mullanacross, Drumsnat Parish, County Monaghan) who between the 8th and 10th centuries compiled the now lost *Book of Drum Snechta*. It would have been composed in honor of their patrons, the lords of Fernmagh, who were Airgialla, descendants of Colla da Crích. The core of the story regarding the attack on the Ulaid, the Battle of Carn Achad Leth Derg, and the taking of swordland would have been based on local traditions, kept alive by the proximity of the site of the battle.

The traditional account of the Three Collas is that they were brothers, nephews of Fiachaid Srabhtine, High King at Tara. Their names were Cairrell Colla Uais, Muredach Colla fo Crích, and Aed Colla Mend. They killed their uncle, the story says, and Colla Uais became king in his place. Four years later Fiachad's son Muredach Tirech drove them into exile and with three hundred warriors they went to Alba for three years. At the end of this time they returned to Ireland, made peace with Muredach, and became his champions. Some time later he sent them against the Ulaid and at the battle of Carn Achadh Leth Derg they won sword-land in Ulster, founding the families known collectively as the Airgialla.

Professor T. F. O Rahilly in his 1946 *Early Irish History and Mythology* said that the Three Collas were not the ancestors of the Airgialla, but were three sons of Niall Noighiallach, son of Muredach Tirech, who conquered and came to inhabit the northwest of Ulster in the fifth century.⁷⁵ This author in a 1998 article in the *Clogher Record* ('The Origin of the Three Collas and the Fall of Emain') argued that there is no strong reason to reject the Collas as conquerors separate from the sons of Niall. The main points presented there will be summarized and then expanded upon here.

The Collas are perhaps the only instance in prehistoric or early historic Ireland of three brothers having each a personal name, a name in common, and an epithet. The implication is that such a naming convention must have been imported, and the obvious source is the Roman Empire. The elements of the Roman naming convention were the *praenomen* (personal), *nomen* (family), and *cognomen* (descriptive or epithet). still familiar today in the name of Gaius Julius Caesar. The more familiar form, of course, is simply Julius Caesar, just as Carrell Colla Uais was more commonly called simply Colla Uais.

This connects with the story of the exile and return of the Collas. Professor O Rahilly demonstrated that many leaders of invasions of Ireland were grafted

74. M. A. O'Brien, 'Irish Origin-Legends', 36-51 of Myles Dillon, ed., *Early Irish Society* (Dublin, 1954). For the lords of Fernmagh see P. Ó Maolagáin, 'Ui Chremthainn and Fir Fernmaighe', *The Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society* XI (1947), No. 3, 157-163.

75. Many have followed O Rahilly in this surmise. Among these was Professor Francis J. Byrne in his *Irish Kings and High Kings* (1973) but he later decided the Collas did not represent the sons of Niall, as expressed in the note on page xvi of the latest edition.

onto the royal Irish family by the *ollaimh* of later times; but in order to explain the surviving stories of their arrivals in Ireland, the stories of their previous exiles from Ireland had to be invented. If this device has been applied to the three Collas, then their 'return' from exile in Alba was their original advent. 'Alba' in their time, the fourth century, included not only Scotland but also Roman Britain and thus the story corresponds with the Roman form of their names.

In Alba, Keating's version of the myth says, the three brothers commanded three hundred warriors for their grandfather, the king Ugari. The name 'Ugari' differs by only one stroke of the pen from *uigari*, the form the Latin word *vicarius* would have taken in Ireland.⁷⁶ In the Roman Empire, many officials and military commanders had *vicarii* or vicars. The most numerous of these in the fourth century were the vicars of absentee tribunes. (Each legion had six tribunes who served immediately beneath the commanding legate, commanding variously sized subdivisions of the legion.) The *vicarii* or 'lieutenant commanders' were the highest-ranking non-commissioned officers in the army, usually having risen through the ranks. This agrees with the Collas having command three hundred warriors in Alba. If they had been centurions, they would have been commanded by a *vicarius* and it would not be unlikely that they were related to him, for in the later empire many occupations were hereditary. This professional military service would explain their prowess as warriors, which brought about the overthrow of the Ulaid.

An origin in fourth century Roman Britain of three men using a Roman naming convention does not necessarily imply Roman blood. Roman citizenship was conferred on all free subjects of the Empire, including free Britons, in 214 A.D. The *nomen* of such subjects of course was not an old Roman family name, but had any of several origins, such as the parentage of the person adopting the name, the person's geographical origin, or an indication of the time one gained citizenship.

Almost no sources of any historical knowledge of British society in the Roman period exist today. The only attempts made to record or preserve any 'history' of the native people were those of Gildas, Nennius, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, who unfortunately had few materials to work with. Geoffrey in his twelfth-century *History of the Kings of Britain* reports many details not now preserved in other works. Much of this seems to be the stuff of fables, but where investigation is possible, there are sources, however incorrectly applied, for many of the names that he mentions.

Geoffrey twice mentions a name similar to that of the Collas. The first of these is a man named 'Coill', whom he places in southeastern Britain about the early second century, a grandson of the generation that opposed the Roman invasion in 43 A.D. Geoffrey makes Coill a great-grandson of the king

76. The letter c between vowels, in words borrowed from British Latin, generally became g. See Kenneth H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 68-72 and 122-148.

Cunobelin, whose royal residence was at Camulodunum, the hill fortress or *dun* of the god Camulos. The later Roman *civitas* on that site was Colonia Camulodunum. This name persisted into the fourth century. The Saxons renamed the town Colne-ceaster and Nennius in the ninth century called the city Cair Colun, both clearly tying its name to that of its river, the Coln or Colun. Today it is Colchester.

The second of the men mentioned by Geoffrey is 'Coel, Duke of Kaercolun' or Colchester, who supposedly lived early in the time of Emperor Constantius or about the year 300. Though nothing reliable is reported of Coel by Geoffrey, the name did persist. After the Norman conquest of 1066, the *Domesday Book* listed the burgesses of Colchester; the majority were Saxons and a few were Norman, but the first name given is the Celtic 'Colman', who held one house and five acres. As late as the middle ages, the western gate of the town was pointed out as the site of King Coel's castle.

It appears possible that a leading British family of the vicinity of Camulodunum might have taken some form of the name of the god or the river as its *nomen*, which survived in Geoffrey of Monmouth as Coill and Coel, survived in the local population in Colman and King Coel's castle, and could have survived a much shorter time as the *nomen* of the three Collas.

The vicinity of Camulodunum, where the name Coel appears so prominently, was the home of the British tribe named the Trinovantes. This tribal name is thought to have been made up of *tri*, 'across' or perhaps 'over' and *novantes*, meaning 'prevailing', 'very strong', or 'quick' or 'eager'. The *literati* of Roman and post-Roman Britain took the name to mean *Troii-novantes*, 'new Trojans', so it is clear both that they did not know the original meaning of the name and that they tried to interpret it in Latin.

A mis-translation of the name 'Trinovantes' may have resulted in the tribal name of the descendants of the Collas, namely Oirgialla or Airgialla. O Rahilly took Airgialla to be a form similar to *argiallaim do*, 'I submit to' or 'I give hostages to,' and thus the name would mean 'hostage givers'. Eoin MacNeil heard in the word a compound of *air* to meaning 'eastern' and *gialla*, 'hostages' in the sense of 'subjects', making the name 'eastern-subjects', explained as living east of the royal family's home, which he took to be in Connaught. Michael O'Brien saw a parallel between Airgialla and district names wherein prefixes of the form *er-*, *air-*, *ar-*, etc. in Irish, Gaulish, and Welsh mean 'in front of' and so Airgialla might mean 'those in front of (having precedence of) the hostages'. None of these explanations tell why the Airgialla would have taken such a name.

If the three Collas came to Ireland from Britain still retaining the knowledge of their old tribal name and repeated it to the Irish *ollaimh*, the latter may have heard in Trinovantes two roots. The first would be *tri-* as a prefix, meaning 'three-fold' or 'arch' or 'over' or 'super' (similar to *tres* in French and in fact the correct meaning of the British prefix as now understood). Translation into Irish would produce the prefix *air-*. The second root is *vantes*. In words taken from

later British-pronounced Latin into Irish, internal 'm' was lenited, that is, turned into a strongly nasal 'b', that is approximately 'v' as we pronounce it today and represented as 'mh' in Gaelic. Also, in some Latin words internal 't' was pronounced as internal 'd'. Beginning with the spoken word and working back to a spelling, 'vantes' could have been seen to have come from the Latin root *mando* meaning 'I commit to the charge of, I entrust, I deliver'. That which is human and is committed, entrusted, or delivered ordinarily must have been a slave. However, applied to free men, the term could only refer to a hostage, represented in Gaelic by the word *giall*. *Giall* also has the meaning 'deposit', a meaning very close to that represented by Latin *mando*. Thus, the Trinovantes could have become, via Latin, the 'Arch-hostages' or the *Air-ghialla*. This clearly is the meaning implied by the *Book of Rights*: the hostages given by the tribe of 'Arch-hostages' were bound only by their oaths, not by fetters like ordinary hostages. Like the *Troi-novantes*, *Airghialla* would not have been a correct translation of Trinovantes, but we can see how it might have come about.

Kuno Meyer pointed out an instance of a fourth century Irish Bishop of Toul, whose name was not simply carried into a Latin form but was translated into Latin, and mis-translated at that, exactly the process proposed here for the name *Airghialla*, but in the opposite direction.

The Name Colla

Perhaps the most serious stance taken against the above suggested origin for the Collas is a statement of O Rahilly that, despite the name collectively applied to them, *na trí Colla*, having 'all the appearance of having been handed down by genuine popular tradition', it is 'obvious that Colla cannot have been the real name of each of the three brothers, and that it must therefore be a kind of nickname equally applicable to all of them'.⁷⁷ He goes on to derive Colla from *Conlae*, which in Middle Irish came to be written *Condla*. *Conlae* was derived from Gaulish *Condollios*, in turn derived from *Condollos*, or 'great head'. This name, he says, we might 'suppose' was applied to Niall Noighiallach and so the three Collas were Niall's sons. Similarly, M. A. O'Brien states that the name was *Conlae*, which in modern Irish has become *Colla*.⁷⁸

O Rahilly also notes, however, that *Conla* as a personal name continued in use down to the 17th century, if not later. This being the case, it is not at all clear how it can be that the name, while remaining in use for centuries, was changed to *Colla* only for the three Collas. (*Colla* as a personal name came to be used by those families claiming descent from the three Collas, but only beginning in the late 1300s.) In addition, *Coir Anmann* provides a glimpse into very ancient manuscripts. 'In ancient books *Coll-ní* is said; it is not right but corrupt to say *Coll-ní* with fada [long-mark], but it is right to say the name shortly, that is,

77. *EIHM*, 230 n 3.

78. M. A. O'Brien, 'The Oldest Account of the Raid of the Collas (circa A.D. 330)', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, ser. 3, vol. 2 (1939) pages 170-177.

na Collai.⁷⁹ The name, then, was not Connla but *Coll-ni*, reminiscent of the name of the river in the Trinovantes territory, at Camulodunum.

O Rahilly cites five uses of Condla for the Collas. A survey of as many of the sources as possible for this use is inconclusive. Such uses are in the *Metrical Dindseanchas*; two recensions of *Cimbaeth Cleithe*; Marianus,⁸⁰ which gives Colla Uais the epithet Roiss and obviously is corrupt; Coir Anmann, composed not before the 12th century; and its derivatives, relative only to Colla focrich; and the version of the myth in Rawlinson 502. Close examination of the six traditional versions of the story of the Collas reveals some of their relationships. Leinster and Laud are very close, in fact nearly identical, but neither could have come from the other; they must have been copied from the same source (which does not exist today). Rawlinson is next in relationship to these, but it cannot be said to be the oldest form of the story, for two sentences in the core of the story regarding the battle of Carn Achad Leth Derg, that appear in every other traditional version prior to Knockninny's, are missing.

The existing sources do not show a transition from Connla to Colla as O Rahilly envisioned. The strongest indication is from *Baile in Scaile*, the earliest work cited, which uses 'Colla'. The most likely explanation is that Colla was the original form of the name; in the Middle Irish period some scribes occasionally substituted Conla, later Condla, a name familiar to them; but later writers returned to consistently use the original name.

Conn Céad Cathach

In the middle ages the main champions of Conn Céad Cathach, the group who most strongly claimed him as ancestor, were not the Uí Niall but the MacDonalds of Scotland, descendants of Colla Uais. One can see in Conn Céad Cathach the great king of the Trinovantes and Catuvellauni, Cunobel or Cunobelin, 'hound of Belin', who died about 40 A.D. and was claimed by Geoffrey of Monmouth to be an ancestor of Coel. The god Belin was also called Bel and Belus. Misapplication of Latin to his name, with 'bel' taken to be *bellus* (war) rather than Belin, could have produced Conn's name and epithet. In support of this idea stands the story of Conn's death at Tuath Ambrais (or Amrois) by the contrivance of Tibradi Tirech of Ulster. Tuath Ambrois was said to be in the vicinity of Tara, but has never been identified. Ambrosius is the Latin word meaning 'pertaining to the immortals, divine', and was taken into Welsh as the personal name Emrys. *Amb-* is also a root word in p-Celtic. The connection with Latin or Britain is what is of importance here. Cunobelin lived during the reign of the emperor Tiberius, who is known to have suppressed a Gallic revolt in 21-22 A.D. and lived until A.D. 37; perhaps he was the origin of Tibradi.

79. *Cóir Anmann*, published by W. H. Stokes and E. Windisch in *Irische Texte mit Übersetzung und Wörterbuch*, series 3, vol. 2 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1897), 348-351.

80. For Marianus see B. McCarthy, *The Codex Palatino-Vaticanus No. 830* (RIA Todd Lecture Series Vol. III), (Dublin, 1892), 93.

The earliest surviving formal list of the kings of Tara is *Baile Cuind Chetcatchaigh*, copied from the lost, eighth century *Book of Drum Snechta* and expanded by later scholars.⁸¹ This poem begins not with Conn but with Art. It does not mention either Conn or Colla Uais. Conn is mentioned only in the title, and this may be a later addition or change, for the *Vita Tripartita* of about the year 900 or later refers to it not as *Baile Cuind Chetcatchaigh*, 'Frenzy of Conn Céad Cathach', but *Baile Cuinn*, which could have meant simply 'Frenzy of Knowledge'. Both Conn and Colla first explicitly appear as kings in the later text *Baile in Scail*, 'Frenzy of the Phantom'.⁸² The existing manuscript of *Baile in Scail* was copied from the book of Dubh Dá Leithe or Dubhdaleithe, Abbot and Bishop of Armagh, who died in the year 1064. From 1046 until his elevation to the episcopacy in 1049 he had been Master of Studies at Armagh, a teacher. His book also contained annals that were quoted by the Four Masters. He was the third of the eight O'Sinach bishops of Armagh, a powerful family that held the episcopacy for over a century. They were Airgialla, descendants of Colla da Crích, brother of Colla Uais. Dubdaleithe's predecessors were his brother Maolmuire (1000-1020) and Maolmuire's son Amalgad (1020-1049). Thurneysen pointed out the possibility that *Baile in Scail* was written during the reign of the powerful King Maelsechlainn of Mide (980-1022). He reasoned that the text names the burial places of a long series of the kings and Maelsechlainn's is the first not named, implying that he had not yet died when it was written. It seems possible that the older poem *Baile Cuinn* was re-written to become *Baile in Scail*, with the addition of the introductory story of Conn Céad Cathach and with Colla Uais added to the list of kings, based on traditions surviving among the Airgialla that Cunobel was ancestor of the Collas. This could have been done by one of the O'Sinach bishops, or under their direction, or perhaps by one of their student-scribes to gain their favor. And thus Cunobel could have entered Irish pre-history as Conn Céad Cathach, the High King.

The epithets of two of the Collas may imply their foreign origin and their history. Menn or Mend means 'stammerer', a name often applied to immigrants to Ireland who did not speak the local language well. Colla da crích, 'two territories', in earlier manuscripts is called *focrich* and similar words, though their meaning is not clear. This perhaps originally was *focrach*, an Old Irish word glossed as 'mercenary', indicating that he was the leader of the forces hired by Muredach Tirech.

XII. The Three Campaigns of the Airgialla

As seen above, over a period of a hundred years, primarily in the third century, the Tara dynasty waged several wars against the Ulaid. During most of the fourth century nothing is heard of this enmity and the reason seems to have been that

81. Rudolf Thurneysen, *Zu Irischen Handschriften und Litteraturdenkmälen*, (Berlin, 191), (IX, 'Baile Chunid Chétchathaig nach der Handschrift von Druium Snechta'), 48-52.

82. Rudolf Thurneysen, 'Baile in Scáil', *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, XX (1936), 213-227.

the two powers were in a state of balance. This balance was tipped in favor of Tara by the apparent arrival, with a band of soldiers, of the Three Collas. They came to Ireland perhaps about 367 when there were mass desertions from the Roman army in Britain. They offered their services to the current king of Tara, Muredach Tirech, and were hired by him as mercenaries for his various wars. About the year 390 Muredach Tirech sent them against the Ulaid.

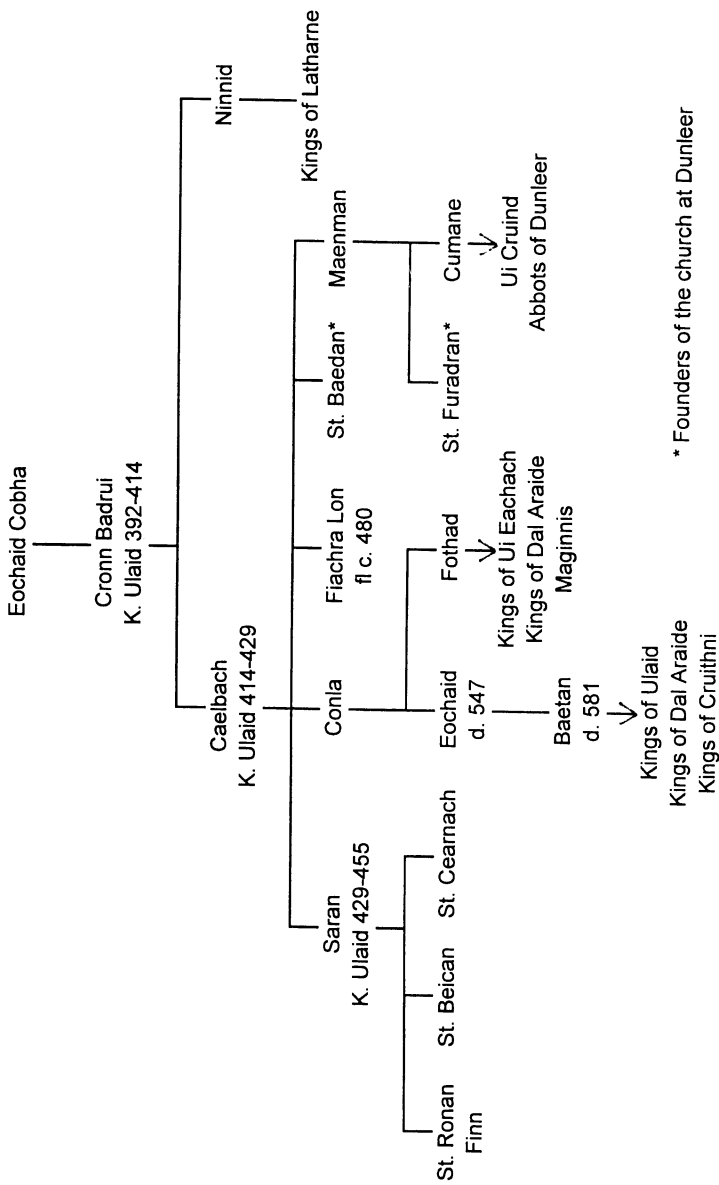
The legend of the Three Collas and their descendants, the Airgialla, represents as one week of daily battles what in reality were three campaigns of the Airgialla and the Tara dynasty against the Ulaid that probably covered a period of some seventy years or more. Seven battles apparently is a mystical theme of the Celts, related to the permanent taking of land, for in addition to the Airgialla legend, it is mentioned in at least two other places. When the Milesians first set foot in Ireland, intending to settle there, Amergin Glunfin is said to have recited a poem, one line of which says, in some versions, 'I am the ox of the seven combats'. It also is a later development of the legend of the Ciannachta, wherein the battle of Crinna (mentioned above, ca 290 A.D.) is followed on the same day by six others that resulted in their taking the lands near Tara and also land in Glen Given in the north (two battles in the immediate vicinity of Crinna that could be interpreted as phases of the same battle, and four others at sites now unknown).⁸³ Like the conquests of the Airgialla, those of the Cianachta were widely separated in time and space.

In the first of the three campaigns, the Collas defeated the Ulaid and killed Fergus Fogha. If the poem *Findaidh oidigh na Colla* be trusted, an early phase of this campaign included a battle in the Cruithni territory of Magh Cobha (the valley of the upper Bann in County Down), where a son of Colla Uais was killed by a spear by the sorcery of Fergus Fogha.⁸⁴ The campaign culminated in a battle at Carn Achad Leth Derg in what later was the kingdom of Fernmaigh, the field now being tentatively identified as Carn Roe in Currin Parish, County Monaghan, not far from Clones. In this battle, it is said, Fergus Fogha killed Colla Mend and in turn was slain by Colla Focrach. The date of this battle is best set by the reigns of the kings, as established above, which indicate the end of Fergus's reign to have occurred about the year 392.

One of the three versions of the poem *Cimbaeth Cleithe* (Lecan 292) says of this battle, *re coecaid bl(iadhna) mbil on cath chianna ria cretim*, a period of fifty years from the battle to the Faith. The coming of the Faith is reckoned as the arrival of Palladius in 431 A.D., so this version places the battle at 381 A.D. Given all the uncertainties of prehistoric Irish chronology and the rounding that might be expected in a poem, this is not a bad fit with the 392 calculated from the regnal lengths. The Airgialla legend states that in their first battles against the Ulaid they were assisted by the Olnecmacht, with whom they had contracted fosterage. These no doubt were Ptolemy's Nagnate and could have included

83. Standish H. O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* (London, Williams and Norgate, 1892), 365. Keating, 325.

84. *Findaidh oidigh na Colla*, in *Book of Ballymote*, 117 a.



* Founders of the church at Dunleer

Figure 7. Early Descendants of Cronn Badrui with Proposed Additions

descendants of the Fomorai, between whom and the king of Ulster there had been great enmity as described in section VI.

This first campaign of the Collas established their family permanently in Magh Lemna and territory stretching from Clogher to the Erne. From the descendants of a (perhaps great-great-) grandson of Colla Focrach, this territory became known as Ui Chremthainn. It included Clogher but did not include Emain Macha. Since Clogher was taken, but not Emain, it seems clear that Fergus Fogha was King of the Middle Kingdom and, as the poem *Cimbaeth cleithe* says, he was defending his own royal castle when he was slain.

This conquest may also have included Crich Mugdorna, centered in today's baronies of Cremorne and Farney in County Monaghan. This territory was inhabited by ancient peoples who remained on the land after this time, with names such as the black-people, the dark-people, the boar-people, etc. In later centuries they were said to descend from Colla Mend. Though this almost certainly was not true, it may be that his descendants were placed in kingship over them.

The king of Ulster who succeeded Fergus Fogha was Cronn Badrui of the Cruithni, whom Keating (in his genealogical section) calls 'king of all Uladh'. The Laud Genealogies and Tribal Histories give him a reign of 22 years, which in the *schema* presented here would be 392 to 414 A.D. Some think his epithet *ba drui* means 'who was a druid'.

Muredach Tirech of Tara, who sent the Collas against the Ulaid, is said to have been killed at Port Righ os Daball, Benburb on the Blackwater. The chronology established above places Muredach's death at 396 A.D., i.e. a few years after Fergus Fogha's defeat. From this it can be inferred that Muredach followed up the victory of the Collas with a military thrust toward Emain, which was halted when Cronn confronted his force and killed him at Port Righ. (Tighernach and the Tara lists ascribe this deed to Cronn's son Caelbach, which would be possible, not during the latter's reign, but if he were acting as his father's military commander.)

The mythical collapsing of the three campaigns of the Airgialla into one caused the loss of Emain to be ascribed to Fergus, so the succeeding kings, Cronn and his son and grandson, were not recognized in later times as kings of Emain. Indeed, their succession being so non-characteristically patrilineal might indicate that the defeat and death of Fergus had disrupted the line of ritual kings who had succeeded by 'marrying Macha', or limited the field of candidates for that position.

The second campaign of the Airgialla was included in one led by three sons of Niall Noighiallach of the Tara dynasty (namely Eoghan, Conal Gulban, and Enda) and a son (Erc) and grandsons of Colla Uais. Its thrust was against the northwest and it resulted in the loss of the bulk of the northern kingdom of Ulster by the Ulaid and the erection of the kingdom of Ailech by the sons of Niall.

The version of the poem *Cimbeath cleithe* in the *Book of Leinster* (21) says of Fergus Fogha's last battle that it was *ré. vi. mhbl(iadhna) bil on chath chian co creatim*, a period of six years from the battle to the Faith, that is, 425 A.D.

The year 425 apparently was calculated from a forty year reign at Ailech by Eoghan mac Niall Noighiallach prior to his death in 465, though what validity the latter date has is uncertain.⁸⁵ This date fits the chronology of Tara, established above, in which Niall Noighiallach died in 427 A.D., for it agrees with a poem of Flann Mainstreach (though of doubtful historical value), according to which Niall's three sons conquered the northwest while Niall was still alive, but without his assent or assistance.⁸⁶ The year 425 then was thought to be that in which the sons of Niall Noighillach and the son and grandsons of Colla Uais took the northwest from the Ulaid. The poem claims that as part of this war a fourth brother, Cairbre mac Niall Noighiallach, conquered the present baronies of Corran and Leyny in Sligo and Gaileanga in Mayo, presumably inhabited by the Olnecmacht.

(The combining of the three campaigns of the Airgialla into one, at 425 A.D., caused the author of *Baile in Scaile*, the first to insert Colla Uais into the list of kings of Tara, to place his reign after that of Niall Noighiallach. He apparently lacked any way of correlating the dates or reigns of the kings of Tara with those of the Ulster kings, for this placement flies in the face of the story that the Collas defeated Fergus Fogha, whose reign was long before Niall's. The eleventh century *Annals of Tighernach* place Colla as king before Muredach Tirech, as do all later authors except Marianus later in that century, who placed Colla after Muredach Tirech.)

The Ciannachta, who (at least in myth) assisted Cormac Ulfada of Tara in the battle of Crinna and were established by him on land near Tara, also participated in this fifth century campaign and were established on land in the north. Theirs is the only tradition that preserves any memory of the fifth century battles. The *Annals of Tighernach* (s.a. 248) record four battles as following the battle of Crinna (for it was Crinna and these four that won for the Ciannachta their swordlands): Conachan, Sithbe, Druim Fuait, and Carn Eolairg. Conachan and Sithbe are unknown. Druim Fuait probably relates to Sliabh Fuaid in present County Armagh. Carn Eolairg was the area now called Magilligan, in northern County Derry. The Ciannachta tradition preserved together the memory of the five battles by which they won their swordlands and Tighernach presented them all together in the year of Crinna, but the last two must have occurred during the campaigns of the Airgialla.

The sons of Niall Noighiallach took as their portion of the conquered lands the present County Donegal. To Conal went the western portion, Tir Chonaill; to Eoghan went the northern peninsula, Inis Eoghain; to Enna nominally went Magh Enda, the land south of Ailech. The cyclopean fortress of Ailech became the fortress of the king. The auxiliaries took lands east of the Foyle. The grandson of Colla Uais, namely Carthenn, took Tir Carthainn (now represented by the barony of Tirkeeran, the valley of the Faughan), immediately east of the

85. *EIHM*, 222 cites Flann Mainistrech, LL 181 b 14-16. See also *Archivium Hibernicum*, II/48.

86. W. M. Hennessy and D. H. Kelley, *Book of Fenagh* (Dublin, 1875), 313-317.

Foyle. To the south (reaching to the borders of the Kingdom of Clogher or Ui Crimthainn) were settled the ancestors of the Ui Fiachra Ardsratha. To the east, in the west side of the Bann valley, were settled the ancestors of the Fir Lí and the Ui Thuirtri. As their reward, the Ciannachta were given Glen Geimhin in present County Londonderry, between Tir Carthainn and Fir Lí. The nobility of the Cruithni were driven east of the lower Bann. Their limited kingdom there became known as Dál Araide and its capital was at Rath Rogain or Rath Mór Magh Linne, near the later town of Antrim. A minor tuath of Cruithni remained at Carn Eolarg, with a fortress called Dun Cruithni (still today called Dun Crune).

The King of Emain at this time was Caelbach (or Caelbad) mac Cruind of the Cruithni, who was king of Ulster for fifteen years,⁸⁷ 414 to 429 A.D. He also was called King at Tara for one year, following Muredach Tirech, according to the long chronology, but this is simply a tie to a claim that he had killed Muredach Tirech. Caelbach had a son who was alive in 477 and possibly a grandson who died in 547, so he must have died long after the era of Muredach Tirech's death.

Sarán son of Caelbach ruled Ulster for 26 years,⁸⁸ i.e. about 429 to 455 A.D. It was during his reign that Saint Patrick first landed in Ulster, near Dundrum Bay in the Dál Fiatach territory of Magh Inis. Sarán opposed the preaching of the Christian Gospel, but Patrick was well received by the local Dál Fiatach chieftain, Dichu mac Trichem. Dichu became Patrick's first convert to Christianity, soon to be followed by his family and most of his people. Patrick's first church was at Sabhall-Phadraig (Saul) in Magh Inis, two miles from the local capital at Dun Lethglass. Sarán's brother Conla also accepted the Gospel from Patrick and conferred on him a site for a monastery at Magh-Commuir, now Comber in County Down.⁸⁹

In 455 Sarán was succeeded as king by Muredach Muinderg of the Dál Fiatach, who reigned for 24 years⁹⁰ and died in 479 (between 476 and 483 per the annals). He was their first Christian king and in the name of his ancestor (Daire) and people he gave Drum Saillech, Willow Ridge, now Armagh, to Patrick. (In later legend, Daire is represented as a member of the Airgialla, but with a chronologically impossible ancestry. *Lebor na hUidre* correctly calls Daire King of the Ulaid, not a king of the Airgialla.) Various sources date this donation between 444 and 461.

As late as the early seventh century the Airgialla were still tributary to whoever was the Uí Néill, that is, the high king of that family or confederation, be he from its northern or its southern branch. It was not until about the year 650 that the Airgialla began to fall under the 'sole dominion' of the Northern Uí

87. Keating, 680; Laud, 610.

88. Laud, 610.

89. The Abé MacGeoghegan, *The History of Ireland ...*, translated by Patrick O'Kelly (Dublin, James Duffy, 1844), 144.

90. *Book of Leinster*, 41 c.

Néill, the Cenél nEógain of Ailech and Tír Eógain. Meanwhile, by a process now very obscure, the kingdoms of the Southern Uí Néill (Mide and Brega) were consolidated by the conquest of the loose tribal federations that previously had existed there. The Airgialla who settled in that area, i.e. the Uí Macc Uais Mide, the Uí Macc Uais Breg, and the Mugdorna Breg, became subject to the Southern Uí Néill.

The third campaign of the Airgialla was a successful thrust against Emain by the sons of Colla Focrach's grandson Felim, under the leadership of the 'Southern Uí Niall'. The king of the Tara dynasty at this time was Oilill Molt mac Nath-í, grand-nephew of Niall Noighiallach, who reigned from 457 until 477. This campaign may have consisted of only one battle, called Creeve Derg (Druim Direagra or Croib Derga) in the poem *Oirgiallaig ardmora uaish* by Flann Mainstreach,⁹¹ that site being part of the Emain complex. The battle is said to have lasted a summer day and a summer night, until it reached the men (kings or idols) of the Ulaid. This campaign took place after St Patrick had founded Armagh, probably around the 460s or as late as 470, and after the battle Patrick retreated east of Glen Righe into the lands of the Dál Fiatach with Muredach Muinderg.

The much-maligned first portion of the list of the 'Coarbs of Patrick' (in four manuscripts, with some variations) lists Pátraic, Sechnall (xiii years), Sen-Pátraic (x or ii), Benén (x), Iarlaithe (xiii), Cormac (xv), etc.⁹² Sechnall, the first coarb listed after St Patrick, was the missionary bishop of the Southern Uí Néill in Meath. If the Southern Uí Néill and the Airgialla drove the Ulaid from Emain, and Patrick from Armagh, the bishop then taking control of Armagh for the Christians among the conquerors would have been their bishop, namely Sechnall, as stated in the list. It is possible that, thirteen years after the taking of Armagh and Emain by the Airgialla, perhaps when Sechnall died, an accommodation was reached among the churchmen that allowed Patrick in his old age once again to take control, the coarbship, of his own church at Armagh (even though he continued to reside among his converts in Down). Thus he, himself, could have appeared in the list of coarbs a second time as Sen-Pátraic, beginning the confusion about 'two Patricks'. The interjection of Sechnall of Meath between two periods of rule of Armagh by St Patrick would reconcile the list of coarbs with the tradition, preserved in the annals, that Benén was the second and Iarlaithe the third Bishop of Armagh.

If St Patrick died in 493; and if Sechnall appears in the list of coarbs between two representations of St Patrick; and if the numbers of years in the list are correct; then Emain 'fell' to the Airgialla about the year 470.

91. *Oirgiallaig ardmora uaish* in British Library, Egerton MS 90, f 18 col. 2.

92. H. J. Lawler, and R. I. Best, 'The Ancient List of the Coarbs of Patrick', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 35 C (1919), 316-362.

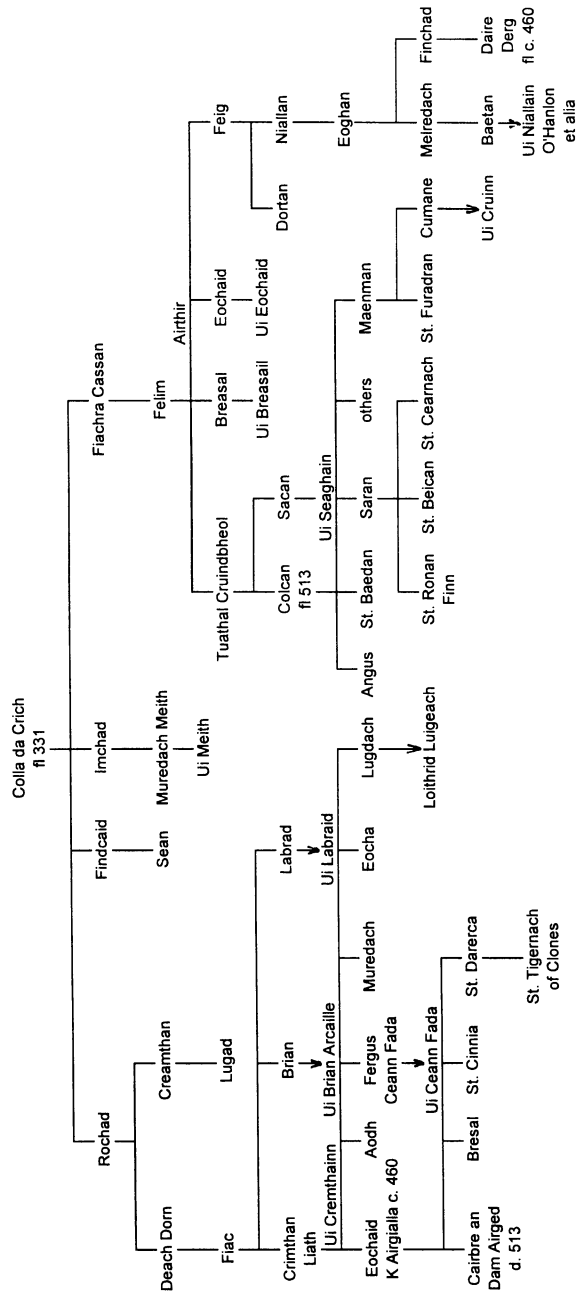


Figure 8. Traditional Descendants of Colla da Crich.

XII. Mixing of Peoples, Genealogies, and Traditions

The Genealogies

The foundation legend of the Airgialla says that, after they conquered Emain, the Ulaid retreated across Glen Righe. The Ulaid peoples or lands that entered the pages of early history were (1) Conaille, a Cruithni people in north Louth; (2) the Dál Fiatach on the Down coast; (3) the Dál Riada (an Érainn people) on the Antrim Coast; and (4) the Cruithni Dál Araide in the interior of Antrim and the valley of the lower Bann, and apparently also the upper Bann. The capital of the latter was at Rath Mór Maig Lini, Moylinny, near the town of Antrim. There were both Cruithni and Dál Fiatach kings of the Ulaid down to the tenth century, and each of the sub-kingdoms had its own dynasty. The family and other histories, however, seem to indicate that little actual movement of Ulaid population took place and it would be better to say that as a result of the Airgialla conquests the power of the kings of Ulaid became limited to the area east of Glen Righe, for the Cruithni and other old peoples survived for centuries throughout south-central Ulster.

The Airgialla tribes that grew from the leaders in the last campaign, who settled in the newly won lands were the Ui Breasail, the Ui Eochaid, and the Ui Niallain, descendants of Felim mac Fiachra meic Colla Focrach, from whom several of the present baronies of County Armagh are named. They were known collectively as the Airthir, the eastern branch of the Airgialla.

If the Airthir displaced any of the former inhabitants, it was only to squeeze them either lower in society, where they became unknown, or into a smaller portion of their lands. There was a tribe in Orier, County Armagh called Uí Cruindbeos whom the genealogical tracts in the *Book of Ballymote* and elsewhere say were members of the Airgialla. The late Archbishop O'Fiaich wrote of this family in 1951 and noted the medieval vicarage south or east of Armagh that was called Tuaghgruyn, Tuagh Ua gCruinn. This probably represented a small portion of their original homeland. By the eighth century the heads of the family had become hereditary abbots of Dunleer in present County Louth.⁹³ Their genealogies look as if Tuathal, an early member of the Airgialla, with the epithet Cruindbeos, was confused with Cronn Badruí; and Tuathal's son Colcan with Cronn's son Caelbach. Colcan (who lived in 513) is given as son Caelbach's son Sarán along with Maenman, ancestor of Uí Cruindbeos. This Sarán is given as children Saints Ronan Finn, Beicen, and Cearnach. St Ronan Finn resided in Magheralin Parish, in the northwest corner of County Down on the border of County Armagh. St Cearnach most likely was the bishop said to have lived in the time of St Patrick and to have assisted in writing the *Seanchas Mór*. This coincidence with St Patrick would be unlikely were the Airgialla connection correct, but would be exactly correct if St Cearnach's father were Sarán the King of the Ulaid. It would appear that the Uí Cruindbeos were

93. Tomás Ó Fiaich, 'Uí Cruinn, a Lost Louth Sept' in *The Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society* (1951), vol. XII, no. 3, 105-112. With thanks to Bishop Joseph Duffy for the reference.

descendants of Cronn Badrui, whom the genealogists of much later times misidentified because they lived among the Airgialla.⁹⁴ Along with the sons of Sarán and the Uí Cruindbeos one would have to identify as Cruithni the brothers and saints Furadran and Baithen, the founders of the church at Dunleer.

By the middle of the sixth century western, interior County Down, that is Uí Eachach Cobha or Iveagh, was in the possession of the Dál Araide, descendants of Cronn Badrui and ancestors of Maginnis of Iveagh. O Rahilly apparently thought their presence there represented an invasion of Dál Fiatach territory, but they may have been in possession there all along. The Uí Eachach Cobha and Cronn's descendants in Orier, west across Glen Righe, form one group of Cruithni in lands that undoubtedly were theirs prior to the battle of Creeve Derg, were but divided between two kingdoms after that battle.

Further confusion in the family trees of the Airgialla was caused by the scholarly dating of the battle of Carn Achad Leth Derg to 331 rather than the 390s. The genealogies were clumsily amended by the insertion of two generations just after the Collas, but only in some instances. In the case of the Airther lineages, no adjustment was made. In the Uí Creamthainn lineages, Fiachra son of Colla Focrach was split in two. In his original position as son of Colla Focrach he was given the epithet 'Cassan' and he remained as ancestor of the Airther. However, he also was turned into Fiac and made son of an inserted Deach Dorn son of (also inserted) Rochadh, son of Colla Focrach. (The name Deach Dorn was borrowed from Deadhach Dorn, a son of Colla Menn.) Creamthan mac Fiachra (along with his son Lugad) appears twice in the revised version, first in his proper generation as a grandson of Colla Focrach, but through the inserted Rochadh instead of through Fiachra, and again as son of Fiac in the latter's new position as son of Deach Dorn. As can be seen on Figure 9, in the proposed restoration of the original family tree, Cairbre an Dam Airged, king of Uí Creamthainn who died in 513, is properly aligned with Colcan of the Airther, who was alive in that same year. The years per generation from Colla Focrach to Eochaid (whom Patrick met) average something over twenty, and to Cairbre and Colcan in the next generation about thirty, as might be expected. A similar insertion, sometimes of one, sometimes of two generations (named Eochaid) appears immediately following Colla Uais in some of the later versions of his descendants' lineages, but the earlier versions without these names also survive.

Within the Uí Creamthainn kingdom, families survived that as late as 1700 A.D. claimed to be Cruithni, by claiming descent from Cronn Badrui. These were the Ó Dúnan Domnaigh, the Clann Mic a Lasair, and the Clann Mhégaircháin of Fermanagh (though the latter appear to have immigrated about the year 1000). In addition, the Monaghan family claimed descent from the ancient Fír Manach.⁹⁵

94. The Uí Cruindbeos are called MicAnanaig in National Library of Ireland MS G-177, 53a, and are cognate with the Uí Colmán Maigin. This theory of a confused genealogy for Sarán is supported by the lack of any reference to him in the Dál Aradian portion of the 'History of the Descendants of Ir'. Cf. note 99.

95. 'Geinealaighe Fearmanach' in *Analecta Hibernica* (1931), no. 3, 135, 143, 144, 146.

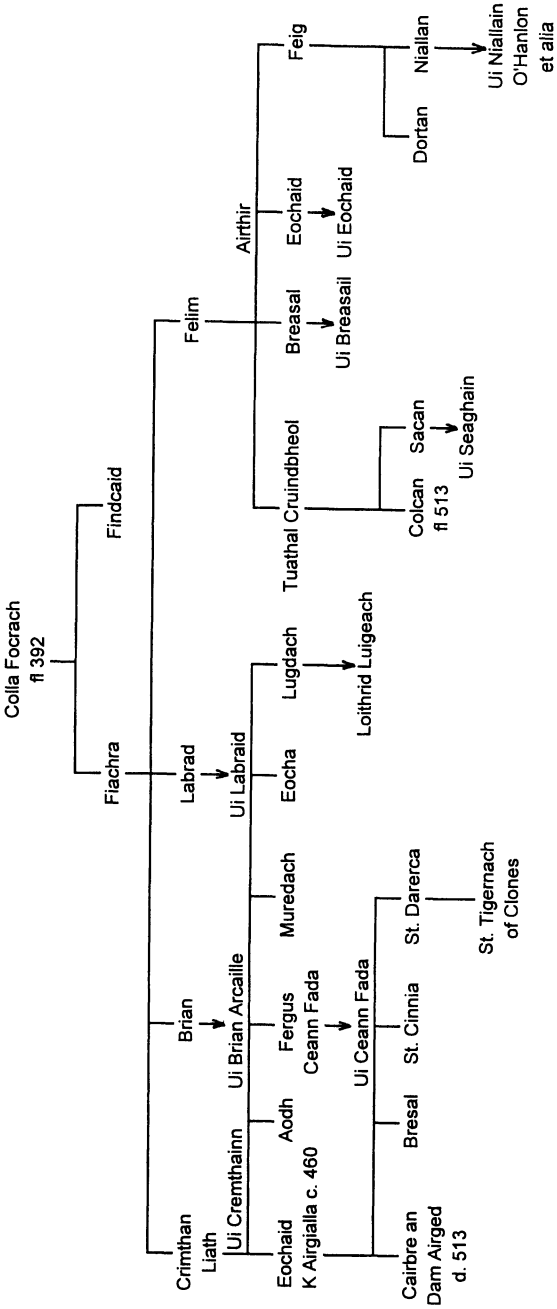


Figure 9. Proposed Revision, Descendants of Colla Focrach

Between Uí Creamthainn and Airthir were the Mugdorna, apparently ancient peoples who had been subject to the Ulaid and now became subject to the Airgialla. The genealogists of the middle ages claimed that the seven tribes descended from seven sons of Mugdorn Dubh. The latter was supposed to be a son of Colla Menn. (However, the name could mean 'Slave of Black Dorn'. The only two legendary persons named Dorn were women, one a noblewoman who was servant to Fergus mac Leti, the other a Scottish woman who trained Cúchulainn. Perhaps she originally was a goddess of this ancient people.) The seven tribes were the Dubraige or Corco Duib (people or seed of Dubh), the Caeraige (black people), Artraige, and Snobriage; to the west were the Papraige and Sordraige (boar-people); and to the south the Corco Inmeand. The later kingdoms of Uí Méith in the Monaghan area and the Fir Rois in the borderlands of Monaghan and Meath seem to represent these people. However, the lords of Mugdorna from the seventh to the ninth centuries were descendants of Colla Menn.

In the far north, the Cruithni remained at Carn Eolarg (also called Carrac Eolarg and Ard Eolarg) with their fortress at Dun Cruithne. In the year 477 (or 482) the battle of Ocha (near Tara) marked the end of the reign of Oilill Molt of Tara. In this battle Oilill was defeated and slain by his own relatives with the assistance of Fiachra Lon, son of Caelbach, King of Dál Araide. The Dál Aradians took a large part in this battle and, according to the Four Masters, in gratitude the Uí Niall gave them the overlordship of two northern *tuatha*, namely the Fir Lí of the Airgialla and Carn Eolarg. In 562 a battle was won at Móin Doire Lothair by the northern Uí Niall over seven kings of the Cruithni and as a result Carn Eolairg and the Fir Lí came directly under the overlordship of the Northern Uí Niall. Some doubt the interpretation given by the Four Masters to the events of 477 and say that at the battle in 562 these lands were conquered from the Cruithni for the first time. This need not be true, however, for the lands taken from the Cruithni kingdom and settled in the conquest of the early fifth century did not fall under the Northern Uí Niall but under their nominal high king at Tara. Thus it was indeed something new when they fell under the Northern Uí Niall for the first time in 562. Other surviving tribes from before the conquest of Ulster were the Corbraige in Fanad, from whom came the mother of St Colmcille, and perhaps the people of Magh Enda.

The Churchmen

Among the Christian converts from the Cruithni were some known to have lived and worked among the Dál Fiatach. The converts included the siblings Donart, Ailean, Aidan, Mura (later of Fahan in Inishowen), Mochumma of Drumbo, and Cillen. Their father was Eochaid, a 'king of Ulster'. Donart became Bishop of Rathmurbuilg in Dál Riada and died in 506; at one time he had a church on the side of Sliab Slanga, highest of the Mourne Mountains, which was renamed Sliabh Donart for him. Cillen lived at Achadhcail on the bank of Dundrum Bay.⁹⁶

The Dál Fiatach, Patrick's first converts and supporters, provided some early clergy to other tribes and kingdoms and some early bishops to the Irish Church. Dichu

96. James O'Laverty, *An Historical Account of the Diocese of Down and Connor* (Dublin: James Duffy & Sons, 1878), I/47ff, 54.

mac Trichem, Patrick's first convert, had brothers named Ros and Duirthecht. Ros resided at Derlus, a fort later the site of the Castle of Bright in County Down. He was visited and converted by Patrick. He presided over the church at Dunlethglas and is known as St Ros. He was a poet and a doctor of *Berla Feini*, an ancient form of Irish, and one of the nine said to have drawn up the *Senchus Mór*. His brother Durthecht, also known as a saint, lived in the Cruithni territory of Aendrum (now Island Magee). The third Bishop of Armagh was Iarlath mac Trena mac Feic, a nephew of Trichem and cousin of Dichu. He was 'from' Clonfeacle in County Armagh, according to the list of coarbs of Patrick, but MacGeoghegan confirms that Trena was a Dál Fiatach prince of Mourne. Similarly a later bishop, Ailill, was 'from' Drum Chád in O Bressail in County Armagh, but was a son of Trichem of the Dál Fiatach.⁹⁷

St Cearnach, son of Sarán of the Ulaid, was connected with Drum Lighen near Lifford.

The Traditions

As the Ulaid aristocracy were forced into the east, some of their stories and legends that originated in the west moved with them. Loch Rudraighe, for example, was the name of the Erne mouth, but also became the name of Inner Dundrum Bay in County Down.

A legend of Eochaid and Conand or Conaing, identified above as Fomoraige, seems to have been brought to the east. Briefly told, this legend says that Eochaid, Lord of Ulster, dwelt in Emain for 19 years (xix vs. xxx for Eochaid Eolachair) and was drowned when Lind-múne erupted over Liath-múine, and so the lake was renamed Lough nEathach after the king. King Eochaid's son Conaing survived and was the ancestor of Dál Selle and Dál mBuain.⁹⁸ The territory of the Dál mBuain was in the middle Lagan Valley, in the vicinity of Lisburn and Hillsborough and they were a branch of the Dál mBuinne. The Dál mBuain are identified as the people of Miliucc mac Buan, St Patrick's master in his days of captivity. This captivity took place in the west, however: St Patrick's place of captivity was near the Wood of Foclut, in Tirawley in Mayo. Perhaps significantly, another branch of the Dál mBuinne was said to be the Galini, whom the scribe admitted were of Leinster origin.⁹⁹ No doubt these were a branch of the Galeoin, who had another branch in County Mayo, east of Tirawley, for whom the barony of Gallen was named. With the Dál mBuain and the Galini as another branch of the Dál mBuinne are listed the Cenél nEmain, reminiscent of the people in the story of Rudraige who were drowned by Loch Erne. (See section II above.) The stories of Eochaid and the flood, Miliucc and the Dál mBuain, and groups of the Galini and Ernai seem to have moved east together.

There is a remote possibility that the Red Hand, symbol of Ulster, also may have come from the west. Pmy, a god of the Phoenicians and Carthaginians, was named above as, perhaps, the god worshipped by the Fomoraige. In Gadir, Pmy was worshipped in the shrine of Ba'al Hammon. The latter originally was the god Amon

97. *Notulae* in the *Book of Armagh*; Whitley Stokes, *The Tripartite Life of Patrick* (London, 1887), 37, 39, 40, 221. See also O'Laverty, op. cit., 1/225, 268, 358; and MacGeoghegan, op. cit., 139, 149. Cf. note 99.

98. 'Rennes Dindsenchas', *Revue Celtique*, XVI (1895), 152-153.

99. *Book of Leinster*, 198 b 2 ff, published as 'History of the Descendants of Ir', translated by E. Dobbs, in *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie*, xiv.

of Egypt, where artists depicted males, including dieties, with red skins. His most common symbol among the Carthaginians, often represented in isolation, was his right hand raised in benediction. Bress, the Fomoraige king of Clogher, could have brought the symbol that far east, where six reigns later we find Lugaid Lámhderg (red hand) on the throne. From Clogher, we may hypothesize, the Cruithni brought the symbol east of the Bann after being defeated by the Airgialla. Although the Red Hand is first documented in the 13th century when it was used by the DeBurgo earls of Ulster and later was used by the O'Neills, as late as the late seventeenth century it was well known that the symbol properly belonged to Maginnis of Iveagh, representing the kings of the Cruithni.¹⁰⁰

XIII. Highlights of the Rewoven Tapestry

Early in the first century B.C. there was a politico-religious movement under way to unify the northern portion of Ireland. This was perhaps brought about by cultural links with Celts on the continent, which had revived after being dormant for several centuries. That part of Ireland, as implied in the story of Sobarki and elsewhere, was larger than the later province of Ulster. Its southern limit in the east was the Boyne and in the west it sometimes included Sligo. The main bases of power were the patrilineal Dáirine in the east and, of lesser importance, the Dál Riada; the seemingly matrilineal Cruithni with their goddess Macha in the center with local kingdoms of Cualnge in the east and Clogher in central Ulster; the Fomoraige in the west; and the patrilineal people of the south (later Westmeath), represented in legend by Dithorba.

In 95 B.C. this movement resulted in the construction at ancient Emain Macha of a new *síd brugh*, a spirit mansion for the male god who was to be the unifying principle, the god Nuadu, who had been imported from Britain. The *síd brugh* represented the new unity by incorporating the stones of older cairns that had been the focal points of the individual kingdoms, along with earth from the different regions.

The movement was not without opposition and war was waged between the Cruithni and the patrilineal peoples. Resolution was achieved to the satisfaction of the Cruithni by having each ritual king of Emain chosen not by patrilinearity but by having a noble from one of the local kingdoms ritually marry Macha. The first of these was Cimbaeth, who married Macha about 70 B.C. About this time the records of a dynasty at Clogher also begin.

The next king, Eochaid, was of the Fomoraige, who lived in what now is north Sligo and perhaps were followers of Pumu, a god of the Phoenicians of the western Mediterranean, for some claim that the Fomoraige were from Africa. The contention continued in his time, breaking forth in warfare between his own people and the followers of Nuadu. Eochaid was defeated, but the struggle continued, in perhaps more a political than a religious sense. Conand, his successor in the local kingdom, ruled by force a portion of western Ulster. He allied himself with Bress Righ, a

100. For the seventeenth century sources see Eugene O'Curry, *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, III/664-5, 277-8; and A. J. Hughes, 'The Seventeenth-century Ulster/Scottish contention of the Red Hand: background and significance', 78-94 of *Gaelic and Scots in Harmony, Proceedings of the Second International Conference on the Languages of Scotland*, ed. Derick S. Thomson (1988).

Fomoraige who had become king of Clogher. This alliance allowed Conand to carry the war as far as Dál Riada before being crushed by the followers of Nuadu in an attack on his tower on Dernish. The Ulster kingdom remained united under the succeeding husbands of Macha, though in time the Fomoraige territory fell away and the Ulster kingdom's boundary in the west became the Drowes or the Dubh. (In succeeding centuries this land was occupied by Ptolemy's second century Nagnate, namesake of the Olnecmacht.)

Clogher was occupied and rebuilt by men from Britain, be they returning Irish mercenaries or Britons by birth, apparently under a king called Duach Finn. Duach's successor was Enna Derg, who may have been Enna mac Ratha, the seventh King of Emain. Lugaid Iardonn was slain at Clogher, apparently marking the early second century abandonment of the fortress there.

It was about 180 A.D. that Conchobar MacNessa, son of Factna Fathach of Cualnge, married Macha. Probably an older, experienced man, he was much more than a ritual king. He had already conquered the Luaighni (Ptolemy's Blani) of North Leinster in the battle of Rosnaree. He had to wage a defensive war against the invader Tuathal Tectmar, against whom he fought a major battle at Aenach Macha, and whom he finally slew in Magh Linne (southern Antrim). After a relatively short but very active reign, he was slain in battle by Eogan mac Durthacht, king of Fernmaigh, at Coill Lamrigh in the territory of Ros (between Cualnge and Fernmaigh).

While Conchobar Ceaim mac Cathbaid was ritual King of Emain (c. 260-320 A.D.), Cormac Ulfada renewed the war between North Leinster (now become the core of a new kingdom) and Ulster. His first active opponent was Fiachaich Araide of the Cruithni, who fought the battle of Fochait Muirthemne about 275 A.D. Later, it was said, Fergus Dubhdedach of the Dál Fiatach or Dáirine was defeated by Cormac at Crinna on the Boyne.

Fergus Fogha, King of Emain from ca 317 until 392, was also King of the middle kingdom, represented at times by Clogher, and perhaps was king of the Cruithni in Alba. His era was prosperous, thanks to the introduction of the coulter plow. To the south, the Tara dynasty was busy fighting the Lagen. Fiacaith Sraibtni of Tara and his kinsmen were slain at the battle of Cnamross about 366 by Bresal Bealach, King of Leinster. Fiacaith's successor Muredach Tirech hired the three Collas, experienced soldiers from Britain, as his mercenaries. In time they invaded Ulster and fought Fergus Fogha in Magh Cobha. About 392 they again invaded the north and defeated and killed Fergus at the battle of Carn Achad Leth Derg and wrested the kingdom of Clogher from the Cruithni. The Ulaide did not lose their ritual center of Emain then, but the loss of the middle kingdom of Ulster greatly weakened the ritual kingship centered there. Matrilinearity, if it had been practiced by the Cruithni in Ireland, was waning, or perhaps marriage to Macha had ended, for the next three kings were a series of fathers and sons of the Cruithni.

Cronn Badrai (from Magh Cobha or vicinity), King of Emain c. 392-414, avenged Fergus Fogha. When Muredach Tirech invaded Ulster, Cronn's son Caelbach as military commander killed him at Port Righ on the Blackwater around 396.

Cronn's son Caelbach (c. 414-429) or perhaps the sub-king of the northern kingdom, after a series of battles ending at Carn Eolairg in 425 A.D. lost the northern

part of the kingdom, west of the lower Bann, to three sons of Niall Noighiallach and the family of Colla Uais and their auxiliary Ciannachta. The Cruithni nobles, now limited to the territories east of the lower Bann, set up the kingdom of Dál Araide. The Cruithni aristocracy who moved east of the Bann took with them many of their legends and traditions, including their symbolic Red Hand.

During the reign of Caelbach's son Sarán (c. 429-455) St Patrick arrived and evangelized the Dál Fiatach. Sarán opposed Patrick, but his brothers and sons welcomed him.

Sarán's successor was Muredach Muinderg (c. 455-479) of the Dál Fiatach or Dáirine. Having already become Christian, about 460 this king and his people gave Drum Sailech to Patrick, to become his see of Armagh. About 470 the descendants of Colla Focrach from around Clogher and the 'Tara' dynasty came to Emain and fought there the battle called Creeve Derg. They defeated Muiredach Muinderg and limited his power to the lands east of Glen Righe. Thus ended forever the Kingdom of Emain, though there continued to be a line of kings of Ulaid selected from the Dál Fiatach and the remaining Cruithni people, the Dál Araide, for several centuries. St Patrick left his new see at Armagh to Sechnall, bishop of the Christians of the vicinity of Tara. Even though years later Patrick regained control of the church lands there, his home remained among the Dál Fiatach, where he died and was buried.

Emain Macha, for nearly five centuries the ritual center of the united kingdom of Ulster, lost its importance about 392 not because of its loss to the Airgialla, which happened later, and perhaps not only because of the death of its King Fergus Fogha in battle against the Airgialla, for kings had died before, but because of the coincident loss to them of the great Cruithni middle kingdom of Ulster. The unity of the kingdom was shattered and the unifying power of Nuadu and Macha, represented by the *síd brugh* at Emain, clearly was at an end. The Christian religion was soon to make its appearance, and its rapid advance in Ulster no doubt was assisted by the battles of the Airgialla that had shattered the unity of Ulster and thereby weakened the five-century hold of the religion of Macha and Nuadu upon the people. If the theory that the Collas had served in arms under the Empire in Britain be correct, then it is clear that in this indirect way Romano-British arms helped prepare the way for the Romano-British saint who evangelized Ulster and Connaught.

While the old legends and tales of Ulster are very interesting, the re-woven tapestry of pre-history, with the scenes reconnected to each other, is vastly more complex and worthy of further study. The study thus far has demonstrated that, although their methods were faulty, the eleventh-century synchronists' contention that Ireland was one nation, made up of one people, certainly was true at least of Ulster. The various peoples of Ulster and even the aristocracy were becoming thoroughly mixed together even as early as the sixth century.

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Andrew, 11th Lord Blayney in 1802
(from a miniature by Horace Hone, courtesy of Monaghan County Museum)